June 18

Quality - Variety - Action

ARGOSY

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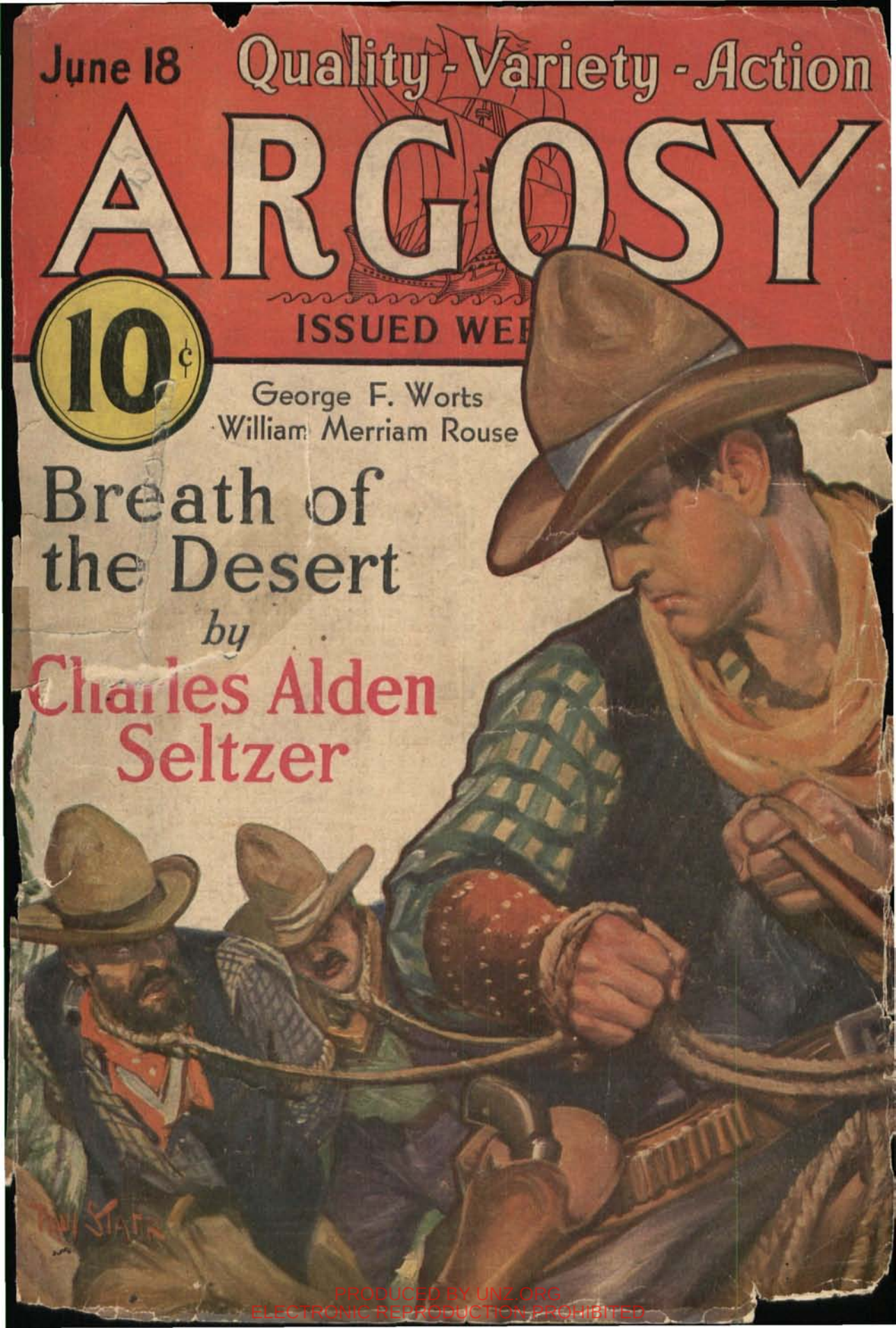
William Merriam Rouse

Breath of the Desert

by

Charles Alden Seltzer



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ARGOSY

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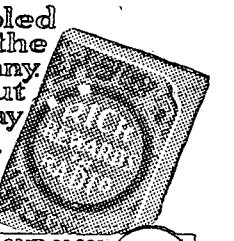

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ARGOSY

Action Stories of Every Variety

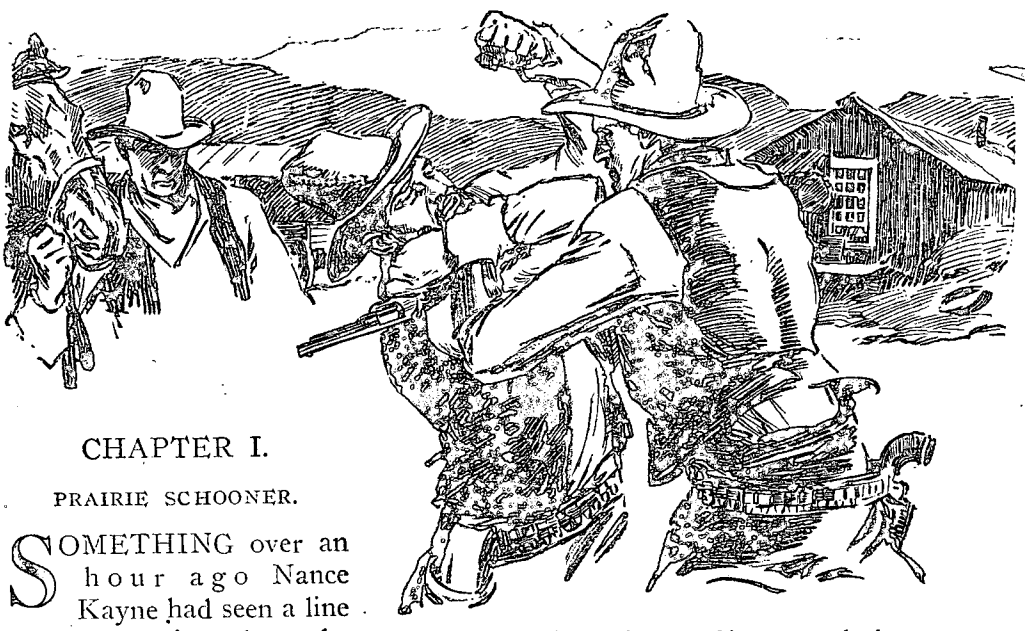
VOLUME 230 SATURDAY, JUNE 18, 1932 NUMBER 4

Breath of the Desert*

By CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

Author of "Gone North," "Double Cross Ranch," etc.

To an Arizona cowman like Thor Underhill, some killings were justified, out where the arm of the law seldom reached



Swiftly, Thor bent his gun arm back

CHAPTER I.

PRAIRIE SCHOONER.

SOMETHING over an hour ago Nance Kayne had seen a line of dots moving along the crest of a high ridge; and now, from the great slope which she and Jesse Carson were descending, she saw the line of dots again. This time they seemed like a string of beads as they appeared to slide down the knife-like edge of a declivity on the skyline.

She knew that the dots were horses, for she had witnessed similar scenes

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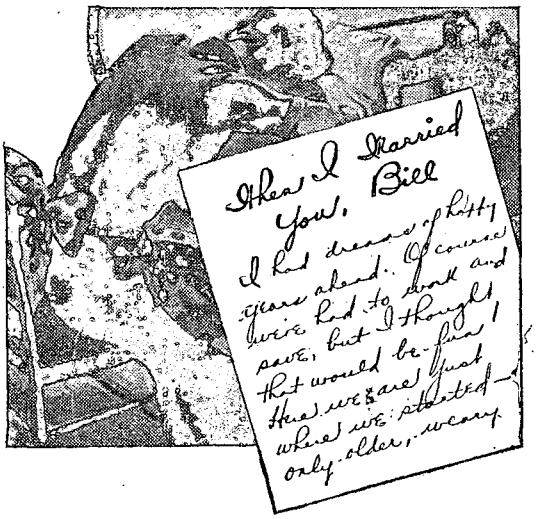

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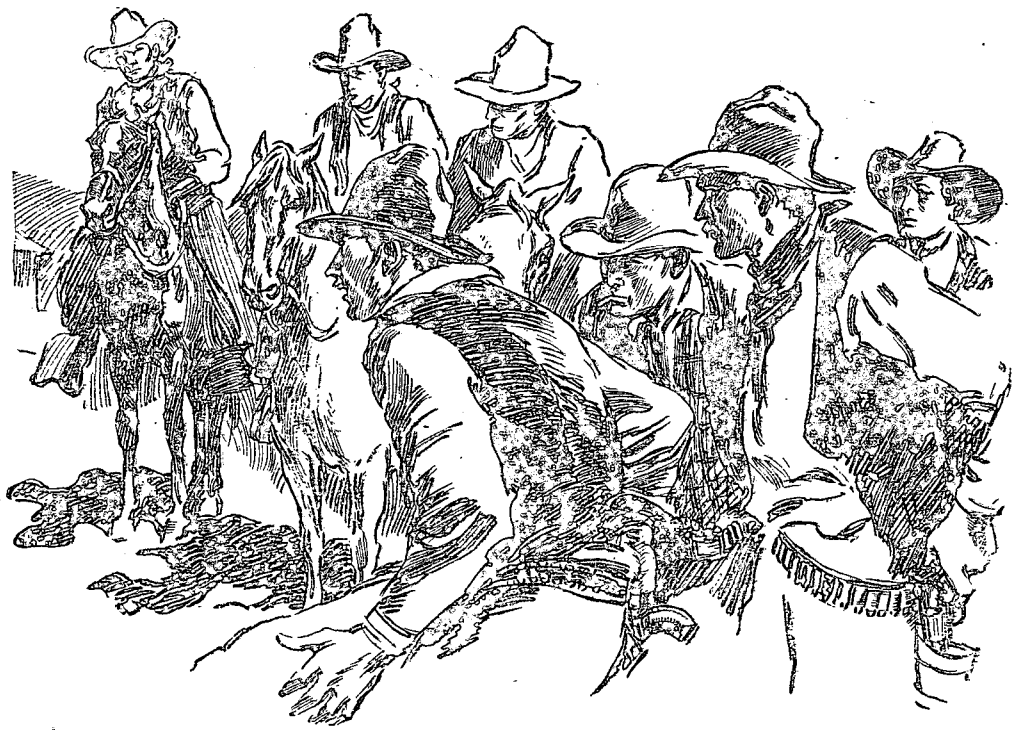
in Wyoming, where her father owned a ranch. She estimated that the animals were at least twenty miles distant, and it seemed that somewhere in the vast country that yawned ahead of them she and Carson would meet the line of horses, provided they all proceeded at the pace they were now going.

For many miles, extending from the bottom of the slope down which she and Carson were riding, was an undulating country featured by low, rolling hills, wild gorges, huge rock escarpments, and some timber. Beyond this rough country spread a gigantic valley, perhaps forty or fifty miles wide. Ahead of her in the valley, to her right and to her left, rose two mountain ranges, probably twenty miles apart at the point nearest to her. They ran together like two sides of a triangle, almost meeting at a point many miles eastward. There was timber upon the slopes of the mountains, but their crests were bare and white and they gleamed in the sun. At the base of each mountain range, on the inner side of the triangle, ran a stream of water. These streams also appeared to meet in the dim distance.

"Why," she exclaimed, "it looks like a gigantic wishbone!"

Carson was riding a little ahead of her, and he now reined in and smiled at her.

"That's what it is, Nance," he said. "That's the Wishbone Range. If you look far enough, you'll see that they don't quite meet like a wishbone meets, though. There's a gorge there, between them. And then there's a short range beginning at the head of the gorge, which completes the illusion of the



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wishbone. The two creeks meet in the gorge after coming separately from the east divide. They mingle there for a few miles and then separate. Ain't it the darnedest thing you ever saw?"

"It's wonderful," she agreed.

Nance Kayne was making her first visit to Arizona. She had lived on a ranch in Wyoming all of the twenty-one years of her life, and the only novelty that Arizona presented was in the startling ruggedness of its landscape, and the awful, almost threatening, majesty of its desolation. It was beautiful, though, she decided.

"Twenty-five miles beyond the shoulder of the Wishbone is the town of Two Rivers, where we have been sending our mail and getting yours," said Carson. "It's a cow town, and it's mighty tough. There's no railroad within two hundred miles. Loma, where I met you, is the nearest rail point. We're out of touch with everything here, Nance. There's no roads, no law, and mighty little of anything else—except cattle. We'll get home to-night, maybe."

He glanced approvingly at her. "Camping in the open last night don't seem to have hurt you none," he added.

Nance smiled broadly at him. She was tall, lissom. Her hair was brown, her eyes hazel. There was an odd light of serenity in those eyes, and her chin and the set of her head were slightly challenging. She rode well, and her clear, tanned skin indicated that she led an outdoor life.

They were on the big level, though several miles east of the two tips of the Wishbone Range, when Carson again spoke:

"Pretty soon we'll be coming to the wagon. It's out here a few miles further, just where you see that dry wash cutting into that little gully."

"Wagon?"

"A spring wagon, Nance. I left it there so's we could ride back to the ranch in it. It ain't bad driving from where I left the wagon, but I reckon if I'd have driven it to Loma you'd have been jounced around considerable by this time. I toted the saddles in the wagon that far, and then unhitched the horses and rode the rest of the way to meet you. I figured you'd be tired of riding horseback by the time we got to the wagon."

"Why, that was very thoughtful of you, Uncle Jesse," the girl exclaimed, gratefully. "I *am* getting a little tired."

"We'll grub when we get there," said Carson. "That is, if some hungry animal ain't stole the grub I left in the box under the seat. It's mighty near noon now, and I reckon you'll be a mite hungry by the time we get to the wagon."

CARSON was right, for the sun was almost directly overhead when they drew their horses to a halt near the spring wagon.

Nance dismounted, while Carson unsaddled the horses, led them down into a gully to a water hole. When he brought them back he staked them out to graze, and threw the saddles into the bed of the wagon. Nance moved about on the little knoll at the edge of the wash, stretched herself to disperse the saddle weariness, and filled her vision with the rugged beauty of the country surrounding her.

And now once again she saw the drove of horses. They were still a great distance from her, however, off toward the southern tip of the Wishbone. She found herself wondering if Carson knew of the presence of the horses. If he did he gave no sign.

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He got food from under the seat of the wagon, built a small fire from some chapparal growth, got water from a slender stream above the water hole, made some coffee and fried some bacon.

Presently he called to her. She was hungry, and the food tasted good, and by the time Carson hitched the animals to the wagon she was refreshed and eager to go on. She forgot about the riders.

There was a faint, narrow trail undulating over the floor of the valley, and Carson followed it. He was now veering slightly northward, evidently toward a pass through the northern tip of the Wishbone, and when she asked him about the change in direction he told her that the J Bar C, his ranch, was beyond the mountain range.

They were some distance east of the two tips of the Wishbone when Carson drew the horse to a halt and gazed quizzically at Nance.

"I'm wanting to show you something," he said, pointing off to a spot some yards from the trail.

She saw the crumbling remains of what had once been a wagon of the prairie schooner type. In the sand were still some remnants of the reach and the strap iron and bolts which had been a part of it. There was a section of the rear axle, felloes and spokes, and the iron with which they had been welded, and the braces. The charred remnants of a wheel could be seen at the front; traces of the burned hubs were still visible. Portions of the wagon bed not entirely consumed by the holocaust which had apparently overtaken the outfit were also visible. Nearby, one on each side of it, were the skeletons of two horses. The bones were bleached to a startling whiteness and were scattered a little, as though wild animals had been among them. The skulls were bleached and ghastly.

Nance held her breath as she gazed fearfully about her.

"There wasn't no humans in that fire, so far as I know," said Carson. "Anyhow, nobody around here ever heard that there was. Of course, there must have been humans with the wagon, and it's likely the Indians took them away. You'll see there's traces of arrows around. When I first saw the remains of the wagon and the horses there was arrows sticking in the sides of the horses. That was something over twenty years ago, and we ain't ever heard anything about who was in the wagon when the Indians got them, except that it had come through Loma, with a man driving it and a woman who had a baby which the folks in Loma said they thought was three or four months old, maybe. They seemed to have plenty of money."

CARSON drove on. The spectacle she had witnessed had depressed Nance, and she was silent. It wasn't the first tale of the atrocities of the red marauders that she had heard, but her conception of the awfulness of this one made the silence and the desolation of this solemn section of the world increasingly terrible.

She and Carson rode on, Carson busy with his driving, Nance staring into space, lost to her thoughts.

And then suddenly she saw the group of riders again. They were ahead of the wagon and directly on the trail, at the base of a giant cottonwood tree, in a swale. The horses were grouped. In the shade of the giant tree half a dozen cowboys were lounging. Three other men were sitting near, but apart from the others, and the girl observed that there was something strange in the

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appearance of these three. They appeared to be staring at the ground in front of them, in an attitude of sullen dejection.

Drawing nearer to them, Nance saw that the hands of each man were tied behind him, and that around each man's neck was a rope which fastened them together like the links of a chain.

Nance turned a glance of startled inquiry upon Carson. And now she knew that all along Carson had been aware of the horses and their riders. For he said quietly:

"That's Thor Underhill and some of his riders. Thor's been gone more than a week, chasing horse-thieves. I reckon he's got them."

CHAPTER II.

HANGMAN.

THERE had come a sudden startling change in the atmosphere. The slumbrous peace of the early afternoon had been swiftly superseded by a dead stillness, by the cold calm that gave a definite promise of tragedy.

"I knew we'd be buttin' in on something," said Carson. "I been hoping they'd get on ahead of us. But it seems to me they want us to go first."

"Do you think they are going to hang those men?" whispered Nance. Her voice was unsteady.

Carson did not look at her. "I reckon that's what they're aimin' to do."

He slowed the horses, but kept to the trail. Nance saw him raise his right hand in greeting, and at the movement one of the cowboys got up and moved forward.

"Hold on there, Carson," called the cowboy. "I'm wanting a word with you."

Carson halted the horses.

The cowboy came toward the wagon, moving with the smoothly flowing undulations of the habitual rider. He was a tall young man; a bronzed giant with heavy muscular shoulders, narrow hips and long legs. He had bold, challenging eyes, in which gleamed serenity and whimsical humor. This man, thought Nance, was not to be trifled with.

He wore overalls which were stuffed into the soft tops of his boots; a gray woolen shirt, a vest, unbuttoned; a rather worn gray Stetson hat; and a black, cartridge-studded belt supporting a heavy six-shooter in a black holster.

He came and stood near the wagon, on Carson's side. He looked at Carson, but Nance knew that his gaze included her.

"Hello, Underhill," greeted Carson. "This is my niece, Nance Kayne, from Wyoming, who has come to stay with us for a while."

The level gaze of the cowboy shifted, and he was looking straight at Nance. There was a steady intensity in his eyes that disturbed her, baffled her. He smiled faintly, lifted his hat.

"I'm mighty glad to meet you, ma'am," he said. His voice was deep, quiet. Now she knew that he was what he seemed to be; careful, capable and master of himself.

His gaze shifted back to Carson. "Bill Oviatt has just died, Carson. He was shot day before yesterday, and we were trying to get him back to the Flying U before he cashed in. We didn't quite make it. Bill had a wish. If he died he wanted to be planted in the Flying U graveyard. We aim to take him there, but we've got business up the Wishbone a couple dozen miles maybe, and it wouldn't be just the thing to take him along. We can't leave him here, and I'm asking you to take him in your wagon to the Flying U."

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"Sure," agreed Carson, quietly.

Nance turned a dismayed glance at the group of cowboys to see what she had not noticed before, that one of them was lying upon his back, motionless and rigid.

This grim tragedy stirred her emotions. Thoughts of the prospect in store for the three men with the rope looped around their necks horrified her, and the color drained out of her cheeks. She longed to tell Underhill that she didn't want to finish the ride to the Flying U with a dead man riding behind her. Then, because of a peculiar, half derisive expression in his eyes, she decided that she hated him. She also decided that she was ruthless.

SHE said nothing, however, as Underhill abruptly turned and motioned to the group of cowboys.

Oviatt's body was raised and carried to the rear of the wagon, Underhill having meanwhile shoved the two saddles aside to provide additional room.

Nance did not glance toward the rear of the wagon, for she did not care to witness what was happening there. But she could not help hearing the men's voices, which were low but clear and distinct in the strange stillness.

"I reckon he'll ride all right that way, if he ain't bounced around too much," said one man, soberly.

"It ain't just the way Bill figured he'd go back," said another.

There was a short silence, and Nance felt that the riders were grouped around the wagon bed. She wished Carson would drive on. She did not want to remain longer. She had feared that Underhill and his men might decide to hang the three men immediately.

She was amazed at Carson's calmness. He seemed to be unaffected by the presence of Oviatt's body in the wagon; and his manner indicated that he had little concern for the fate of the three men who were roped together. Instead, he seemed merely curious.

"So you got them?" he said. Carson had turned in the wagon seat; and though Nance did not move her head to look, she got the impression that he was talking to Thor Underhill. It was Underhill who answered.

"Yes. We caught up with them on the other side of the Capitans."

"There was only three of them, eh?" persisted Carson.

"Five," answered Underhill. "Two of them weren't fit for riding."

Two of the horse-thieves had been killed, Nance divined. She sat very still.

"Get back all the horses?" asked Carson.

"We lost two. But we got five in return."

"Got any idea who was behind it?"

Underhill seemed to hesitate. Then he said shortly, "Not yet. But we intend to find out."

Torture? Did Underhill and his men intend to compel the three thieves to divulge the name of the man who had prompted them to steal the horses?

Nance glanced at the three thieves. Then she slowly turned and looked at Underhill. He did not see her. He was standing sideways to her. His arms were folded, his hat brim was pulled well down over his eyes. He, too, was looking at the three thieves; and Nance felt that never in her life had she seen such determination upon any man's face. His face might have been carved from granite. She shuddered.

"All right, Carson," said Underhill presently. "I reckon you can get going. Tell Dad we'll be in later."

Nance would have begged for the lives of the three men, but she knew

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that any plea she might make would be unavailing. There was something about Thor Underhill that made the idea of interference ridiculous. She knew that he would never swerve from any purpose that he had decided upon. She knew there was no hope for the three men, and so when Carson spoke to the horses and they began to move away from the scene, the girl knew that the three men would be seen no more.

As the wagon went up the slope of the swale toward the higher country she looked back. The three thieves had not moved; nor had the cowboys who accompanied Underhill. But Underhill had turned and was facing the wagon. His arms were still folded, his hat brim was still well down over his eyes. Nance was now too far away to be certain, but she was almost positive that upon Underhill's lips as he watched, was a faintly sarcastic smile.

And then the wagon rolled down a gully into a little basin, across the basin to a gorge, and through the gorge to a level. Presently they left the level and mounted a ridge, and so away into the northern distances.

CHAPTER III.

HISTORY.

CARSON drove slowly, carefully, silently. His face was long, solemn. Nance divined that for all his mild indifference when talking with Underhill he was now deeply concerned over what had happened.

Several times Nance had stolen glances at him. At last her curiosity conquered her.

"What kind of a man is Underhill, Uncle Jesse?" She tried to keep her voice from betraying her.

"Eh! What? What's that you say?"

"I asked you about Thor Underhill. What kind of a man is he?"

"Well, there ain't no secret about that, Nance. Underhill is Underhill. There ain't a man like him anywhere, as far as I know."

"That hardly answers my question, does it?"

Carson glanced quickly at her. He grinned deprecatingly.

"Maybe not," he answered. "Just the same it's the truth. I reckon if there was another man like Thor, and they was to meet, hell would be popping right considerable." He stared meditatively at the trail ahead. "It's darn hard to pin your mind down to anything settled and certain about Thor. He's a sort of a mystery. About all that anybody knows about him is that he's so cussed stubborn that he'd make a mule seem to be uncertain in his ways. When he acts friendly toward you, you can bet all you've got that he's your friend; but if you're an enemy, you'll know that too. There won't be any question about it."

"Oh, I see. I thought as much. But are you sure it is stubbornness you see in him, Uncle Jesse? Don't you think that what you call stubbornness is merely independence of thought and confidence, and perhaps contempt for authority?"

There was astonishment in Carson's glance at Nance.

"I reckon you hit it! Darned if you ain't! It's eluded me. But now that you speak of it, I can see you're right."

"Do you think he is going to hang those men?" asked Nance.

"Thor will do whatever he's set out to do," declared Carson. "It ain't always easy to anticipate Thor's trail. There's been trouble brewing between Thor and the Sladens. There's three of the Sladens. Bill and Blackie, who are

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brothers, and Steele, Bill's son. They own a ranch in the country south of the Wishbone. They call it the Hat. There's been some suspicion that some of the Flying U's stock has been rebranded Hat. That's easy to do. You just take a slightly bent iron and run it across to cover the two tips of the wings on the U and you've got the Hat Brand. Thor ain't been sure, I reckon, but he's aiming to find out, and I reckon he will."

"Do you think those three thieves were Sladen men?"

Carson shook his head.

"Maybe. Maybe not. But it's evident that Thor has ideas."

AS they drove on, Carson divulged the history of the Sladens and outlined their relations with the Underhills and other near-by ranchers.

"The Sladens came into this country before I did, and before the Underhills. They had this range all to themselves, and they resented neighbors. The Sladen brothers, Bill and Blackie, tried to drive old Jason Underhill out. Jason is Thor's father. But Jason wasn't minded to go, and he didn't go. There's been bad blood between the Sladens and the Underhills right along. Steele Sladen is about Thor's age and size—if anything, he's bigger than Thor. When they were about sixteen years old they come together out on the range somewhere. Both of them was pretty well beat up, and the fight they had didn't settle anything. They hate each other, but their hate is different. Steele Sladen does a lot of talking about Thor, running him down to other men, and belittling him, but he keeps out of Thor's way. Thor don't say anything. Some day Steele will cross Thor's path again, and when that happens Thor will square things."

Carson ceased talking. Nance asked no more questions.

The wagon made slow progress through the grass land on the other side of the Wishbone Range, for Carson was mindful of the burden the wagon carried. Late afternoon found them near the Flying U ranch. The buildings were on a level, close to the banks of the creek that they had crossed before entering the pass through the mountains.

Dusk had come when Carson drove up to one of the gates of the Flying U corral, brought the horses to a halt and climbed down from the seat. There were dozens of horses in the corral which spanned the creek. Some of the horses still bore saddle marks indicating recent riding.

There was a large stable near the corral, and some other buildings. At a little distance north of the corral was a great, rambling log and adobe building with a big stone chimney rising from the center of a roof which was composed of wide cedar slabs. Nance saw a wide patio and a great veranda fronting the creek.

A man who had been seated on the veranda was walking toward them. In stature this man was startlingly like Thor Underhill, and as he drew nearer Nance had no difficulty in deciding that this was Thor's father. His hair was slightly tinged with gray, but his eyes were clear, his face strong and lean. He walked with a firm, light, graceful stride.

He was like Thor and yet unlike him. For in his eyes as he came nearer Nance saw whimsical humor and kindliness. And now, recognizing Carson, he smiled.

"Shucks, it's Carson," he said. "And I reckon this young woman is that niece you've been bragging about

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so long. Ma'am," he added, addressing Nance, "I reckon we don't need any introduction. I'm mighty glad to see you, and I hope we'll be seeing more of you and that you'll like the country."

With some slight diffidence he grasped Nance's hand and shook it. Then, standing on Nance's side of the wagon, he saw the body in the wagon bed. His eyes sobered, his smile vanished and he looked at Carson.

"That's Bill Oviatt, Carson," he said. "What happened to him?"

Carson told him. Jason Underhill's eyes seemed to chill.

"So Thor's got back?" he said.

CHAPTER IV.

JUDGMENT.

THE three thieves, linked together with the rope chain, were first to mount. No word was spoken. The atmosphere had suddenly become chill and bleak. The sun was shining, the sky was brilliant, yet to all of the men there seemed to have descended upon the land a funereal stillness, a brooding, sinister, awesome calm. The grim business that confronted Thor and his riders had nothing whatever to do with life. Their purpose was to destroy life.

Carson's wagon was no longer in sight. Grouped in the swale, Thor's riders had watched the wagon dwindle in size until it became a mere speck. And then distance had swallowed it.

With Thor leading, the three thieves riding behind him, the other riders trailing, some of them driving the horse herd, the cavalcade moved slowly along a narrow trail into the eastern wilderness. Half an hour later they came to a small box canyon into which the horse herd was driven and the mouth of the canyon barricaded with cedar logs.

Silently the riders moved on again. At times horses and riders were lost to view in vast stretches of timber, but presently they slowly filed into a bottom near a creek. This stream was known locally as the North Fork. The bottom was surrounded by a dense growth of timber. The silence here was more sepulchral than in the open, and when Thor dismounted, the creaking of his saddle sounded as sharply as a pistol shot.

The other riders also dismounted, and the three thieves were helped from their saddles. They stood, still sullen, staring downward.

Two of the horse-thieves were men of middle age, with black, grizzled beards and hair, and black, bead-like, shifty eyes. The third was a young man whose age could not have been much more than twenty. He was taller than the others, and his unshaven face was covered with a light, silky down. He was blond; his blue eyes were rimmed with straw colored lashes, and his eyebrows were of the same hue.

In his dejection, in his sullenness, was agitation. He was not facing his fate with the hardihood that the other two thieves displayed. There was a yearning, wistful, desperate light in his eyes; and his lips, though tightly pressed together, were twitching.

And now came the first word from Thor Underhill.

"This is the place," he said.

HE looked at the three thieves, who stared at him as though seeking to read his cold, unrelenting eyes. Thor's lips tightened perceptibly as he looked straight at the young thief. The Flying U riders had dismounted and stood close, listening and

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watching. Their friend, Bill Oviatt, had been killed; and their wild, untamed minds were filled with bitterness and vengeful lusts. Far back on the trail, where they had witnessed Oviatt's sufferings, they had pleaded with Underhill for permission to hang the three thieves who had murdered him. Now, knowing that the hour of their vengeance was near, they stood with no mercy in their hearts, awaiting word from Thor.

"I've saved you until now," said Thor. "My boys would have swung you yesterday. I saved you until today, to give you a chance to answer the question I asked you when we caught you. I'm repeating the question: Did you steal my horses on your own hook, or did you steal them for somebody else?"

One of the bearded men sneered. "It's none of your damned business!" he answered.

"We're not falling for none of that ranikaboo," said the other bearded man to Thor. "It don't make no difference nohow. We swing, either way."

"Which of you killed Bill Oviatt?" asked Underhill. "He was off in the sand gully when we found him. You two sneaks were over in that direction. One of you killed him. Which one?"

"Take your choice," said one of the men. "We both shot twice at the friend you think so much of. How many times was he hit?"

Four bullets had struck Oviatt. Underhill betrayed no emotion. Acting as judge and jury, he appeared as free from passion and prejudice as any judge in a court of law.

He looked at his riders. "Take them, boys," he said. "They're guilty."

The two bearded thieves were separated from the young one. The rope was taken from their necks, they were placed on their horses and led deep into the timber. After they had gone—all of them, horses and riders, leaving only the young thief and Underhill standing there together—Underhill again spoke.

"Who are you?" he questioned.

"I'm Scott Hayes," replied the thief.

"About twenty-two or -three, eh?" said Underhill.

"Twenty."

"Is stealing horses your business?"

"No. This was the first time I ever stole any horses."

"Who are you riding for?" He gazed straight at the young thief, then added, "You heard me ask your two friends some questions. They gave me the answers they wanted to give me. They weren't the answers I wanted. I'm bound to get the truth. Who were you riding for?"

THE youth found it impossible to meet Underhill's gaze. He bowed his head and looked at the ground. He was making an effort to preserve his self control, but again his lips twitched. Underhill waited.

A full minute passed; then from Scott Hayes: "I'm working for Sladen."

"Which Sladen?"

"Bill."

"Bill tell you to steal my horses?"

"Yes. Bill and Steele."

There was a silence, during which the young thief knew that he was being probed by Underhill's cold, steady, penetrating gaze.

"Where are you from?" questioned Underhill.

"From Santa Cruz county. Near Nogales."

Another silence.

"How long do you think it would take you to get back to Nogales?"

The youth's whole body seemed to

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leap. His muscles strained, he stared at Underhill in open-mouthed amazement.

"Mister," he said, "I'd get back there just as soon as God would let me!"

"You're starting now," said Underhill. He cut the rope that bound the youth's hands behind him, pointed to a horse—the animal that the youth had been riding.

"All right," he ordered. "Ride hard—and don't come back!"

The young man stared. Plainly, he had not hoped for this merciful decision.

"You mean it?" he gasped.

"Hustle before I change my mind," said Underhill.

"Thanks!" The word of gratitude was breathed as the boy leaped for the saddle. He made a wild grab for the reins; there was a scurrying of hoofs, a clatter, and horse and rider fled westward.

It was not long afterward that the Flying U riders emerged from the timber. They were leading two riderless horses, and upon their faces was somber and grim satisfaction. They filed out, rode to where Underhill stood and looked inquiringly at him.

"I turned him loose," said Thor, speaking of the young thief. "He told me the truth, I reckon. Bill Sladen was behind it."

"So that's it?" said the tall rider. "Well, you worked it right. This is where the Sladens will find those two jaspers—if they're ever found."

"I feel right about this now," said another rider. "I don't know how I'd have felt if we'd had to swing the kid. Them other guys had it coming to them. I wasn't sure about the kid."

There was no more talk. When Underhill mounted they all rode back the way they had come, single file over the narrow trail, westward.

An hour or so later, while the sun was sinking beyond the mountain tops, they came to the box canyon where they had left the horses. The animals were driven back to the swale where the riders had met Carson's wagon. From there they followed the trail taken by Carson, and when they were going through the mountain pass darkness overtook them. Then the moon rose.

It was nearly midnight when they turned the horses into a corral. Shortly afterward the men were in the bunk house and Thor was standing at the edge of the big porch of the house, telling the elder Underhill what had happened.

Jason Underhill's jaws were set. "Thor," he said, "the Sladens are changing—for the worse. Whatever it is that gets into people, I don't know. But it seems that when once men turn bad they don't know when to stop. This has been coming a long while."

CHAPTER V.

REPRISAL.

NANCE perceived that there was a difference in cowboys, just as there was a difference between ordinary houses and ranch houses. The difference, she decided, was caused by the country in which ranch houses and cowboys were located.

For example, the topography of Wyoming was different from that of Arizona. Wyoming's mountains were different. They were timber-clad; there was grass to be found on some of their slopes; they were green and lofty and beautiful. Wyoming's valleys were wide and verdant, the plains were pas-

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ture land, the beds of the streams were filled with clear, sparkling water, icy cold.

The ranches themselves were in fertile sections, the ranch buildings, as a rule, were constructed of material not unlike that used in civilized sections of the country. The cowboys, while hardy, steady of eye and nerve, ready to endure any hardship, were not, she realized, compelled to endure the things that Arizona riders endured.

There was something about Arizona that filled one with a sort of vague perturbation. It was in the atmosphere, she felt; in the dead mountain ranges that filled the land; in the dry, dead desert stretches, where little clouds of fine, flinty dust were forever forming spirals that danced, like giant whirling tops; in the shallow water courses that seeped through flat, shallow beds of sand in the valleys, and that trickled over the painted rocks of the canyons. It was in the sparse, hardy vegetation; the low trees; the bare, granite ridges; the grotesque towers and spires and bastioned walls of painted rock; and in the menacing, brooding, whispering breezes that seemed to sweep lazily over the land. There was mystery in the vari-colored, gauzy veils of mist that draped the distant horizons; in the purple shadows of distance. Above all, there was the solemn desolation that hovered over it. The desolation was like a breath that steals slowly upon one, a quiet, calm breath, bearing a sinister message—the breath of the desert.

Mrs. Underhill, Jason's wife and Thor's mother, had received Nance in the house and had given her a room off the patio; and after supper the guest was permitted to retire.

The miracle of Arizona's rosy dawn awakened Nance. She got up, washed and dressed herself and went into the kitchen to greet Mrs. Underhill, to be told that one of Carson's horses had lost a shoe, and that the homeward start would be delayed for an hour or two.

At the breakfast table, Nance sat opposite Thor. She had not heard him come in, and did not know that he had arrived until she saw him enter the dining room. She had known that he was a big man; but not until she saw him standing in the doorway leading to the dining room did she realize how big he really was. But for all his bigness, he was lithe and graceful and admirably proportioned. He carried himself like an athlete. Relieved of the desert dust, the stains of travel, his face shaved, his hair combed, he was handsome.

He still gave Nance the same impression that she had had the day before, however. His somber lustrous eyes were as level, as serene and steady as they had been yesterday. Lurking in them was the same gleam of cold aloofness.

He greeted her quietly, took a seat at the table, and gave his attention entirely to the food, ignoring her completely except when the amenities required that he give her some attention.

AFTER breakfast he went outside. Nance saw him talking with a group of cowboys, down near the corral. Later, Nance walked to where Carson had left the wagon, to discover that Oviatt's body had been removed. What had been done with it she did not know. She suspected that during the night it had been interred by some of the Flying U men.

She had been curious about the three thieves, and in her curiosity there was some determination. So, when later in

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the morning she saw Thor standing at the head of a draw that led down into a valley south of the ranch house, she went to him.

The draw was some distance from the house and the corral. The bunk and mess houses were down that way also, and she observed half a dozen cowboys lounging about. She recognized them as members of the group of riders that had been with Thor the day before. She felt she would never forget their faces.

Thor had been standing motionless for a brief space, staring northwestward over the land, as if seeking something, when he became aware of Nance standing near him.

He looked at her. There was an odd twinkle in his somber eyes. "Carson's in the blacksmith shop, shoeing a horse," he said.

"I'm not looking for my uncle," she answered. "I've been curious, and I want to ask you a question."

"Certainly."

"What did you do with the three horse-thieves?" she asked.

"We swung them."

"Not all of them? Not the young one?—Why, he was only a boy!"

He appeared to be grimly amused at the horror in her eyes. Twice, his lips seemed about to curve into a smile.

"We let the kid off," he said, at last. "But look here," he added. "What's your interest in this? Do you know the kid?"

"I'm not interested," she denied. "I'm only curious about you; about your taking the law into your own hands and constituting yourself judge and jury and executioner. Yesterday, when I first saw you, I wondered if you would have the audacity to go through with it."

"Well, you don't have to do any more wondering."

She stood, looking at him, and she was still wondering. She was wondering how he, a young man, certainly not older than twenty-six or seven, could have acquired such inflexibility of mind and character. He seemed to have no regret or remorse for what he had done.

While she was still watching him she heard a scurrying of hoofs somewhere in the vicinity. Her first thought was that some of the Flying U cowboys had mounted for a ride, and she afterward remembered that she had been startled at their sudden appearance, so close to Thor and herself. For now she heard the swishing of hoofs in the soft sand of the draw behind her, and she turned swiftly to see half a dozen strange riders almost upon them.

Thor had also turned. But the strange riders were all around him now, on the hard ground at the head of the draw.

A big man, taller than Thor—a broad, muscular rider of middle age, with a short black beard, a hooked nose and cold, truculent eyes—slid off his horse and confronted Thor. In spite of the fact that the rider was a score of years older than Thor, he moved with amazing agility and ease. It was apparent that he possessed boundless physical energy, and that his anger was now aroused; for when he alighted from his horse, Nance got the impression that he intended to launch himself upon Thor. But he did not. When he reached a point within perhaps three or four feet of Thor, he halted and seemed to make an effort to control himself. But the words that poured from his lips were full of hate and fury; an outpouring of the man's restrained rage.

"Damn you, Underhill; you've swung Lafe Morrell and Jay Fargo!"

Thor stood, meeting the rider's blaz-

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ing eyes. It seemed to Nance that he was indifferent to the other man's fury. In fact the girl felt there was contempt in his voice as he answered:

"Yes, we swung them, Sladen."

NANCE felt the imminence of tragedy. The atmosphere of romance which had pervaded the land with the coming of the dawn had been suddenly dispelled. Dazed, bewildered, frightened, she turned her head and gazed wonderingly about her. She now saw for the first time that the riders who had accompanied the man called Sladen were armed, and that they were hard-visaged men. Their faces were grim, their eyes were malevolent, as they watched Thor Underhill.

However, the girl's wide, inclusive gaze revealed things that the eyes of the strange riders did not see. There was Thor's father, in the act of descending from the wide porch. He was coming rapidly toward Thor and the group of strange riders. There was a shotgun in his hands, which he was holding with its muzzle pointing in front of him, in the manner of a hunter. Following him, Nance saw two cowboys emerging from the doorway of the mess house. They were buckling on their cartridge belts. Three other Flying U cowboys were running toward the mess house, and three more were advancing toward the crest of the draw. These last three cowboys bore rifles. Down near the corral two other men were running toward the group of riders. Each of these carried a drawn pistol.

Sladen's riders were intent upon the business they had with Thor, so that they failed to observe the advancing Flying U cowboys until they formed a line on the crest of the draw. The men with the rifles were standing rigid, straining, silent. Others of Thor's cowboys were kneeling; and two were lying flat on the crest of the draw, on their stomachs, their heavy revolvers in hand, intently watching Sladen and his riders.

Nance saw Thor's gun, a heavy, black-handled weapon, in its holster. She was amazed at the man's cold composure, at his complete self control; for seemingly, Thor had not responded to Sladen's angry mood. Sladen, observing Thor's indifference, grew still more furious. Nance was convinced that Sladen had not yet seen the Flying U men at the crest of the draw, and that his men were equally ignorant of their presence. Even Thor was unaware of the presence of his men.

"Yes, we swung them, Blackie," repeated Thor. "They were Hat riders. We caught them driving away some Flying U horses.—Is there something else you want to know?"

"Just this," answered Sladen. "I've come here to tell you that you can't get away with it! I'm going to blow you to hell!"

His right hand moved swiftly downward, then upward. His heavy gun flashed out of its holster. But swift as Sladen's hand moved, Thor's was swifter.

Sladen's right wrist was seized by Thor's left hand. The wrist holding the weapon was bent and twisted with such terrific force that the bones seemed to snap. Hand, pistol and arm shot upward and were held there. Sladen's eyes clouded with pain, he screeched in agony. And then, Thor's right hand shot upward. It struck Sladen's chin, underneath, with a sound that strangely resembled that which is made by a flat rock striking the surface of water. Sladen's head snapped back-

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ward, his body slumped inertly, the menacing pistol dropped from his hand.

SLADEN did not fall, however, although he was unconscious. Thor's left arm supported him.

And then, swiftly, with apparent ease, Thor swung Sladen's whole body up from the ground, carried it to Sladen's horse and threw it crossways into the saddle.

Until then, Thor had paid utterly no attention to Sladen's riders. Now he was facing them, and his eyes were blazing with contempt. How it had happened Nance did not know, for she had not witnessed the movement. But in Thor's right hand was the black-handled gun that she had seen at his side.

Seeing his own Flying U men at the crest of the draw, Thor laughed.

"Easy, boys," he said to them. "Don't rub it in. These other horse-thieves aren't to blame. They were just backing Blackie Sladen's play, and Blackie didn't do any playing."

Startled, the strange riders turned their heads. At Thor's bantering words they visibly relaxed, betraying their embarrassment.

"I reckon you can go now," said Thor. "An' take your boss with you. If his neck's broken, he got just what he deserved. You've got just about five minutes to get out of range of a rifle bullet."

The contemptuous smile was still on his lips, but now it vanished and was succeeded by a curious calmness. He stared at one of Sladen's riders.

"Shucks," he said coldly. "It's Scott Hayes."

Hayes, the young thief whose life Thor had spared there in the dark recesses of the timber where the other culprits had forfeited their lives, lowered his chin to his chest and would not meet Thor's gaze.

Nance now recognized Hayes as one of the three thieves who had been linked together with the rope, and she stared at him apprehensively. She gazed at Thor imploringly, but Thor was not looking at her.

"Get down!" Thor ordered the blond youth. "The rest of you hit the breeze—*fast!*"

The riders jumped their horses and rode away, two of them riding beside Blackie Sladen's animal, holding Blackie's inert figure on the saddle. While they were vanishing down the draw toward the lower country, the young thief slipped out of the saddle and stood with bowed head beside his horse.

Thor walked to him, stood in front of him, placed his left hand under the boy's chin and roughly forced him to meet his gaze.

"Home wasn't attractive to you, eh?"

"I run into Sladen and his riders at the south tip of the Wishbone," said Hayes. "I wasn't aimin' to tell them, but they wanted to know where Morrell and Fargo was. I reckon if I hadn't told them I wouldn't be here now." He was sullen, there was a light of desperation in his eyes. "Hell!" he said. "Hang me and be damned to you!"

Thor laughed coldly. "We'll sure accommodate you," he returned.

By this time, Sladen's riders were far down in the valley. Nance could see them as they rode southward, close to the river.

Again tragedy was imminent. Her thoughts were incoherent. She was unaware that she had moved; but presently, in the dead silence that had followed Thor's words, she found herself

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close to Thor, with one hand resting upon the young thief's shoulder.

HOWEVER, she was looking straight at Thor, meeting his eyes, steadily enduring their cold, amused gaze.

"You can't do this!" she protested.

His expression did not change. "Miss Kayne," he said, "you are interfering with my business."

"It's not your business!" she insisted. "It's humanity's business. What you are proposing is murder. You let this boy go once. It would have been bad enough if you had hanged him yesterday. But now it's impossible.—I shan't let you do it!"

Silence greeted her words. Thor was still looking at her, and into his eyes had come a whimsical, appraising gleam. The boy had lowered his head again and would not look upward. The Flying U cowboys were silent. Jason Underhill, the shotgun dangling from his hands, was watching. His face was expressionless. For an instant, Thor seemed about to speak; and Nance knew that if he had spoken at that moment he would have mocked her. But strangely enough, he remained silent.

He looked at the young thief, then at Nance. Then, slowly, he took a backward step, bowed extravagantly.

"All right," he said. "He's yours." He gave her a glance, enigmatic and level, slowly turned and walked to one of the bunk houses.

The Flying U cowboys dispersed, leaving Nance with the young thief. Shame staining his cheeks, the latter listened to the advice proffered by his rescuer. His promises were profuse, and when he at last mounted his horse he spoke again.

"I'm thankin' you, ma'am," he said. "Underhill would sure have kept his word." He smiled, adding, "After this, Thor'll eat out of your hand any time you want him to."

Later, when Nance and Carson entered the buckboard and drove away, she saw Thor standing near a corner of the corral fence, watching her. She waved a hand at him, but got no response.

CHAPTER VI.

THE KILLER.

THOR UNDERHILL'S feelings toward Nance Kayne were not readily defined. So far as he knew, his encounter with her had not affected him at all. As he rode through the pass in the northern rim of the Wishbone Range, on a morning several days later, he was conscious only of a somewhat bored indifference toward her. To be sure, she was a nice looking girl, but she had not touched his emotions. For one thing, she had seemed rather too self-assertive.

Crossing the ford, he followed the trail taken by himself and his men on the day they had hanged the two horse-thieves.

To his astonishment he found himself still thinking of Nance. He kept seeing her eyes when she had told him that she would not permit him to hang Scott Hayes. He had observed her triumph when he had yielded. If she had only known it, she hadn't won much of a victory; for he had had no intention of hanging Hayes.

As he went farther eastward, along the timbered trail, he forgot Nance. And his thoughts dwelt definitely upon Blackie Sladen and his riders. Particularly upon Blackie. Upon the terrific blow he had delivered to Blackie's

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chin. In that blow had been concentrated the accumulated hate of years. He had hit other men, but never had he experienced the savage satisfaction that he had felt in hitting Blackie. Bad feeling between the Underhills and the Sladens had existed for years.

As always, when riding alone through this section of the country, Underhill carried a rifle. It was a weapon of modern type, a repeater, and it now reposed in its sheath on the saddle skirt.

Thor was headed for Two Rivers, the town on the banks of the big Wishbone, twenty-five miles east of the point where the latter divided. He had started late, for he expected to spend the night in Two Rivers, and the sky was shimmering with the blinding light of a noon-day sun when he reached the timber near which the two thieves had been hanged. Riding into the trees, he saw the place where the hanging had occurred. The bodies were no longer there. They had been cut down. Two pieces of rope, looped over the limbs of the trees, were dangling there. He went back to the trail and rode on. Crossing the South Fork he threaded his way through a high-walled canyon and to a smaller canyon that intersected the larger one. Then he followed a clearly defined trail that paralleled the main stream of water.

He was now in the Sladen domain; and he rode slowly, carefully scrutinizing the country and occasionally glancing back into the shimmering distance.

Thor knew that in a little clearing a few hundred yards ahead of him was a small log cabin belonging to the Sladens which was used as a camp for the Hat riders whenever they happened to be grazing a herd in the vicinity. The clearing in which the cabin was situated was surmounted by timbered hills. A ravine skirted the northern side of the clearing, and led down into a section of low, timber-clad country beyond. Giant cottonwoods comprised the timber, with pecans and cedar and spruce thickly interspersed. Manzanita and aspen, post oak and various nondescript brush grew in wild profusion everywhere. The trail ran close to the cabin, around the foot of a wooded slope and into the ravine beyond.

WHEN Thor reached the point in the trail that brought him opposite the cabin, he halted his horse. He had heard a voice. He waited, listening.

Silence. He did not hear the voice again. Intently he scrutinized the surrounding country. He saw no horses in the vicinity, nor had he seen any from the high country through which he had come. Sladen's riders were occupying the cabin, their horses would be somewhere around.

He dismounted, trailed the reins, drew the rifle from its sheath, and made a circuit of the cabin. In a grass swale east of the cabin he saw a horse, a powerful, rangy bay, bearing the Hat brand. Bill Sladen's horse. Evidently Bill Sladen was here alone. But in that case, how explain the voice? Was Bill Sladen in the habit of talking to himself?

Thor was not interested in Sladen's visit to the cabin. It had been curiosity only that had impelled him to investigate, and now he made his way back to his own horse.

He was about to restore the rifle to its sheath when he heard the voice again. Bill Sladen's voice.

"Damn you, come back here!"

So Sladen was not alone, despite the

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fact that there was only one horse visible? And something in Sladen's voice, a hoarse, raging note, sent Thor up the timbered slope to where, although deep in a section of manzanita, he could see both the cabin and the level that immediately surrounded it. He was not more than a hundred feet distant from the front door of the cabin, and he saw Bill Sladen there, standing in front of the door, outside on the ground. He was holding a woman.

Thor got the impression that the woman had been in the cabin, that she had been held there against her will, and that she had sought to escape and had been overtaken by Sladen just as she emerged from the doorway.

At the instant Thor saw them, the woman's back was toward him, and she was fighting to escape Sladen's grasp. Sladen's face was furious.

The woman fought wildly; and Sladen, gripping her shoulders, was striving to drag her back into the cabin. The fellow was a giant in stature, towering head and shoulders above the woman, and his strength was perhaps a dozen times greater than hers. Yet so desperately did she fight him that twice she almost escaped.

Then, suddenly, viciously, shamelessly, Sladen struck her with his fist. It was a brutal, terrific blow, and it landed close to the woman's left temple. Soundlessly she fell, flat on her back. For an instant after striking the blow, Sladen stood rigid, his great muscles straining, his eyes wild with fury, his lips in a snarl. Then he dove forward, gripped the woman by the shoulders, dragged her to her knees, held her with one hand and struck her again with the other hand.

"Damn you!" he yelled. "You're my woman. I'll show you!"

His fist was drawn back again when the rifle in Thor's hands spurted a thin white line of smoke. The report of the weapon was answered by a startled grunt from Sladen.

He stood rigid, balancing himself. The rage fled from his face and was superseded by an expression of stupefaction. The woman slipped from his deadening fingers; he lurched forward, then back; and fell prone, face upward. The woman was still unconscious where Sladen dropped her, a pitiful huddle.

CHAPTER VII.

RESCUE.

FOLLOWING Sladen's fall, there was a period of absolute silence. Thor stood in the manzanita, screened from view. He had lowered the rifle, and he now stood erect, the weapon dangling from his right hand as he listened and watched. Thin and dry as the report of the rifle had been, Thor could hear its echo reverberating between the hills and the cliffs that surrounded the place. It was a full minute before Thor's broad shoulders pushed through the manzanita and he emerged into view. Then, satisfied that there had been no witness to the shooting, and that no Sladen riders were in the vicinity, he crossed the clearing, walked to where Sladen and the woman were lying, and stood, gazing down at them. He looked first at the woman, perceiving that she was breathing slowly and regularly, as if sleeping. There was a slight discoloration on the left side of her face near the cheek bone; but except for that and her pallor she seemed to be none the worse for her experience.

Thor knew her. She was Lyndia

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Kolsar, the daughter of Peter Kolsar, a Pole who owned a small ranch farther up the big Wishbone, toward Two Rivers. The Underhills had had no neighborly intercourse with the Kolsars, despite the fact that the Pole had settled on the Wishbone some years before the Underhills had established their ranch.

Thor knew, however, that the Kolsars had two children, a son called Jake, and Lyndia. It had been several years since Thor had seen Lyndia, but in spite of her transition from adolescence to womanhood, Thor recognized her.

After one glance at Bill Sladen, Thor paid no more attention to him, but went about the task of restoring Lyndia to consciousness. He found water in the cabin, and with this he bathed her face and gently stroked her arms and temples to restore circulation. He was kneeling beside her, brushing her hair back from her forehead, when she opened her eyes and looked at him. She was bewildered and startled, but he saw a light of recognition in her eyes.

Her lips quivered. "What happened, Meester Thor?" she questioned. Before Thor had time to answer she shuddered and moaned. "Oh, that man! That Sladen man. I remember—he hit me. Where is he?"

"He won't bother you again, Lyndia," assured Thor.

The girl relaxed and closed her eyes. But presently she roused again and sought to sit up. Thor helped her to her feet, led her to a bench in front of the cabin and sat beside her endeavoring to calm her, for she was trembling with excitement and apprehension.

She had been a slender, gangling girl when Thor had last seen her; but her figure had rounded out into graceful, lissom lines. And her eyes, which had then peered at one with childlike innocence and frankness, were now veiled with a serene but secretive wisdom. It was as if in passing from adolescence to womanhood she had learned very much of life and was keeping that knowledge to herself. They were dark eyes, brown, almost black, and now there were flecks of gold in them, caused possibly by the tears. Her hair was black; her skin white and clear, almost transparent, in spite of the rigors of the climate. Thor was amazed at the change in her. She had grown into a beautiful woman. But the beauty was not entirely in the seductive lines of her face, but in the firm character he read there.

THOR knew that she would not become hysterical over her experience. Already she was growing more calm. She was sensible.

"What happened?" asked Thor.

"Evertheeng, Meester Thor. My father sold me—sold me to Beel Sladen."

Thor's lips straightened into grim lines. "Let's get this straight, Lyndia. Do you mean to say that your father sold you to Bill Sladen as he would sell a cow or a horse?"

"The same way. Ah, it was terrible, Meester Thor!—My father he owed Beel Sladen money. Beel Sladen said to father, 'I take her, and then we square.' Then father say yes, and Beel Sladen took me.

"Beel Sladen put me on his horse and brought me here this morning. I told him I would run away, and he said if I did he would follow me and kill me. I don't care about that. I would rather be killed than be Beel Sladen's woman. I told him so. Then he grabbed me, but I broke away from him and ran out the door. He grabbed me again. And then—and then—he hit me."

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Underhill got up, stood for a moment in front of Lyndia, looking at her. Then he abruptly turned and walked over to where Bill Sladen had fallen. He knelt beside Sladen and examined the wound in his chest. Sladen was dead. His head had fallen over toward his right shoulder, and Thor took hold of it and straightened it so that the face was turned upward. But when he drew his right hand away he saw that it was covered with blood.

He stared at the hand for an instant, then bent over Sladen again. The fellow had been shot twice, despite the fact that Underhill had sent only one bullet into him. The second wound was in the right side of his head, just above the ear. Underhill's bullet had struck Sladen in the heart.

Underhill got up and glanced toward the ravine, northward, which was the point from which the second bullet must have come. Leaving Lyndia on the bench, Underhill crossed the clearing, strode to the crest of the ravine and peered intently into the dense, wild brush that grew there. Without appearing to be searching for anything in particular, he examined the ravine carefully; and presently, at the bottom, perhaps a hundred yards from the cabin, he found a place where a horse had stood. From there, following a trail of broken twigs, and assisted by an occasional footprint in the sand, he came upon a spot where a man had knelt in the brush. Dropping into the knee-prints, he had a clear view of the spot where Bill Sladen had been standing at the moment Lyndia had fallen as he struck her. Retracing his steps to the bottom of the ravine, Thor discovered that the rider had fled eastward.

He thought he knew what had happened. Probably her father, repenting his action, had followed them to the cabin and sought his revenge.

THOR returned to Lyndia. She sat on the bench, staring straight ahead.

"Well, Lyndia," he said, "I reckon you can go home now. You can ride Sladen's horse."

"I shall never go home again!" declared the girl, hopelessness in her voice. "I don't know where I shall go; but I don't care. My father is no father. I will not see him again."

"I don't reckon I blame you," Thor said at last.

Here was a perplexing problem for Underhill to solve. And he knew that he alone could solve it. As was his custom he decided quickly.

"You'll go home with me, Lyndia. Mother will take care of you. You may stay as long as you like, and go when you please. Suit you?"

The girl smiled wanly. "All right," she said, "I'll go."

She got up and began to coil her tumbled, black hair. She wove it into various loops and twists upon the top of her head, without precision, but in an attractive pattern. She was now very calm, but she seemed uninterested in what was happening.

"Shall I ride Sladen's horse?" she asked.

"I reckon not," answered Underhill. "I'll send Sladen's horse home."

He went to the rear of the cabin, picked up the trailing reins of the mount, and tied them loosely to the pommel of the saddle. He fastened the stirrups to the cinch straps, so that they would not swing out and be caught by various obstructions; then he slapped the horse on his haunches and sent him clattering southward.

When he returned to Lyndia, he

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found her looking at the dead body of Bill Sladen.

"There will be trouble about this," she said. "The Sladens will ask questions. Steele Sladen will be wild."

"Naturally."

"I don't know who killed Beel Sladen," said the girl. "I saw nothing." She appeared to meditate.

"Understand this, Lyndia," said Thor. "I shot Bill Sladen, and I'm not taking the trouble to deny it."

The girl stared at him moodily. "My father is my father," she said. "I shall not go home again. But I don't want to have to tell any one that my father sold me to Beel Sladen, or that Beel Sladen b o u g h t me and brought me here. If I have to say that, I shall go away from this country and never come back."

"That means you don't want me to talk," said Underhill.

"Why should you?" she asked. "No one knows what happened, and no one will ever know, unless you tell them. No one will suspect if I don't tell them that Sladen brought me here."

"All right," agreed U n d e r h i l l. "We'll let it go at that."

HE led the way to his horse, helped Lyndia into the saddle and swung up behind her. In this manner they rode away from the cabin, following the trail over which Underhill had come; and after they had gone a mile or so they saw Bill Sladen's horse trotting steadily south.

For many miles, as they rode, they were as silent as the country. What Lyndia's thoughts were Underhill did not know, but as for himself he was considering the difference in women. For example, there was Nance Kayne. Underhill was wondering if Nance, having undergone an ordeal such as Lyndia had passed through, would have conducted herself as calmly as the Polish girl. He thought not.

Lyndia was proud. She was possessed of a sturdy morality that rebelled against permitting any one to know what her father and Sladen had attempted to do to her. He wondered what her thoughts would be if he told her that he thought her father had followed Sladen and herself to the cabin; that he believed that her father had sped a bullet that would have killed Sladen, even if the one Underhill had sent had not accomplished that purpose. But he didn't intend to tell her that.

They were forced to ride slowly, for the horse was carrying a double burden and the trail was rough. It was late afternoon when they forded the stream at the pass in the mountains and rode slowly up a slope beyond to the higher country. And there, upon a stretch of open plain, they came upon Nance Kayne, riding with a cowboy from her uncle's ranch. Nance noticed that Lyndia and Thor were riding the same horse, but she said nothing. When they had greeted each other she explained that she and the J-C cowboy had spent the day exploring the northern tip of the Wishbone Range. Nodding to Lyndia, Nance appraised her with a glance. Then she smiled at Thor.

"Has something happened?" she asked, intuitively it seemed.

"Nothing has happened," said Thor. "This is Lyndia Kolsar. She was intending to visit my mother. I was over that way and brought her back."

"I'm Nance K a y n e," said the Wyoming girl, smiling at Lyndia. "I am glad to know you, and I hope we shall meet again."

That was all, except that when Nance and her cowboy rode away she

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looked back over her shoulder and called to Underhill.

"I wanted to tell you that Scott Hayes has gone south, as he promised," she said. "I got word from him through a rider who passed him. I want to thank you for your generosity."

Thor did not answer. He rode on with Lyndia, and for several miles there was no word spoken. And then Lyndia said, quietly:

"Nance Kayne doesn't understand why we are both riding the same horse," she said. "She will ask questions."

Underhill had been thinking the same thing.

"Well," he said, "She won't get any answers."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OTHER BULLET.

TO the Two Rivers trail Thor Underhill came again some days later. Yet this time he rode slowly, watchfully, for a whispered word had reached him to the effect that Bill Sladen's body had been found. Bill's horse had reached home riderless, and Bill's brother, Blackie, and Bill's son, Steele, and a group of Hat riders had managed to force the animal to lead them to Bill. There was no indication that the Sladens knew who had killed Bill, but Thor knew he would be suspected.

Lyndia Kolsar had been hospitably received at the Flying U by Thor's mother and father. No explanations had been necessary. Lyndia had merely announced that she had come for a visit, and Thor had said nothing at all. No questions had been asked.

Thor rode on down the slope, toward the clearing in which Bill Sladen had been killed. Certain questions had persisted in occupying his thoughts since the day of the killing, and he intended to find answers for them.

Deep in the timber surrounding the clearing of the Sladen cabin, he halted his horse. The cabin was deserted, the front door closed. Underhill rode into the clearing, paused to inspect various hoof tracks in the sand, then rode on down the ravine in which the rider who had assisted in Bill Sladen's execution had stood, and so away over the east trail.

Two hours later he rode into the Kolsar ranch house yard. He saw Peter Kolsar standing in the doorway of a dilapidated stable, watching him. He rode toward Kolsar and dropped lightly from the saddle close to the man.

Kolsar was a man of medium stature, rather heavy about the shoulders and stomach. His hair was gray, and it bulged outward under the brim of a soiled felt hat.

Underhill had always had the feeling that there was something soiled about the man. There was something unhealthy about him. It was revealed by his slightly pock-marked, pasty face. He wore a heavy mustache with long streaming ends, which he habitually twirled with one hand.

Kolsar looked inquiringly at Underhill, smiling faintly.

"It's T'or Underhill—yes?" he said.

Thor nodded.

"I ain't see you to two—t'ree year, ain't it?" added Kolsar. "And now you come visit me? Somet'ing happen?"

"Nothing much has happened," returned Underhill. "I'm on my way to Two Rivers." He stood, tall, somber

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of face and steady of eye, looking straight at Kolsar.

KOLSAR half smiled, partly opened his mouth to speak, sobered, looked apologetically at the ground, and then up again into the level eyes of his visitor.

"You say notting happen?" he inquired again.

"Nothing.—Where's Lyndia?"

"Lyndia?" Kolsar smiled expansively. "Lyndia she's no here any more. She's went away."

"Where did she go?"

"I have lots trouble wid dat girl," said Kolsar. His pale gray eyes grew lugubrious. "She's wild. She no leesten. She's ron off wid Beel Sladen."

"Where to?" asked Underhill.

"I no could tell. She's ron off wid Sladen. Two—t'ree days ago Blackie Sladen and Steele and some Hat riders come here and tell me Beel iss dead. Some one have keel him. It happen at Beel's range camp, down de creek. Lyndia is wid Beel. She gone."

"Did you look for her?"

"No good to look. She keel Beel, maybe."

"How was Bill killed?"

"Beel shot two times—once in heart, once in head."

"Rifle or pistol?"

Kolsar shook his head. "Maybe rifle, maybe pistol."

"Do you know who killed Sladen?"

"Me? No, no."

Underhill was unable to learn anything from Kolsar's facial expressions. All he knew, or all that he was able to gather, was that the man was a consummate hypocrite and liar. If he had fired one of the bullets that had killed Bill Sladen, he did not intend to admit it; and if he had observed Thor in the vicinity at the time of the killing, he apparently had decided to say nothing about it. There was no expression in his eyes to indicate that there was any secret between himself and his visitor. It was quite possible, though, that Kolsar, like himself, had seen no other person in the vicinity. Both rifles had been discharged at the same instant, and both bullets therefore must have struck their victim simultaneously. Otherwise, Sladen's body would have given some evidence of two distinct shocks, either of which would have been visible to Thor. If both rifles had been discharged simultaneously, the two riflemen would have heard only the report of their own firearms.

"So you don't know who killed Sladen, eh?"

"Me know notting."

"Seen any other riders around?"

Kolsar shook his head negatively. "I see nobody on trail."

"What did the Sladens say?"

"They shake head. Look around. Say two men shot Beel. One in front, one from side."

"You going to try to find Lyndia?"

Kolsar made a gesture of futility. "She come back when she ready," he said.

Of course, a man who would sell his daughter would have no concern for her future or her actions. For a few minutes Underhill stood studying Kolsar. His contempt for the man was steadily growing. Kolsar must have read Underhill's eyes, for he flushed, abruptly turned and entered the stable.

"I work now," he called.

THOR swung into the saddle again and rode across the ranch house yard, a distance of several hundred yards. Sliding from the saddle, he strode to the rear door of the house.

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A fat, florid woman, arrayed in a dirty gingham dress, appeared through a smudge of steam from a wash boiler on the kitchen stove.

She was perspiring profusely; her hair, matted and ropy, hung to her shoulders, and a few stray, damp wisps clung to her forehead. These she brushed back with a soapy hand when she faced Underhill. She was barefooted; and her small, beady eyes were flashing belligerently until she recognized her visitor. Then she smiled apologetically.

"It's Underhill man," she said. She made some attempt to make herself presentable, patting her dress, coiling her hair.

"'Scuse," she added. "I'm wash today. You come in?"

"No, thank you. I'm on my way to Two Rivers, and I thought I'd look in to see how you're getting along. I've been talking to Peter. I don't see Lyndia around, or Jake."

"Jake, he's gone to Two Rivers. Beeg party, there. Dance, music." Then she added, her voice catching in her throat, "Lyndia gone."

"Where?"

The woman's eyes flamed with impotent rage. She shook a fist at the stable.

"Peter done it, the swine! He tell Lyndia to go away wid Beel Sladen. He owe Sladen money, and he let Sladen take her. Me—I can do notting. He push me away and tell me to mind my own business. I ron after Lyndia and Sladen, but Sladen ride fast and laff and make face at me. I no can ride a horse, and I can do notting.—I come back in the house. I am mad, so mad I weesh to keel Peter. I get big knife and I try to catch Peter—I chase heem all over the house. The furniture is all broke up, but I no catch Peter. He ron up ladder to the loft, and he hit at me wid a club when I try to go up after heem. Then I take ladder away.

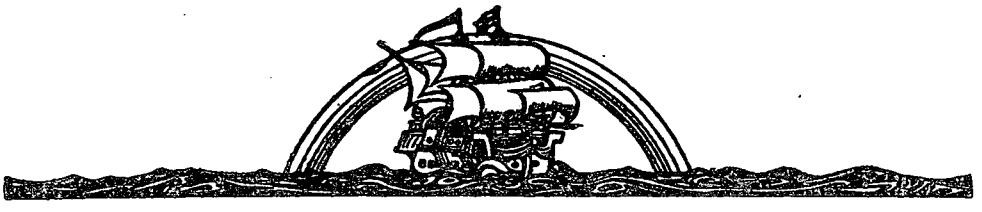
"Peter stay up in the loft two day and night. I'm mad all the time, and Peter he call down and say nice thing to me; but after two days I go to sleep and Peter come down. I'm not so mad now, but I don't speak wit' Peter."

"So Peter was in the loft for two days and two nights, eh?" said Underhill. If that was so . . .

But there was no doubt regarding the state of Mrs. Kolsar's feelings. She was undoubtedly sincere.

As Underhill took leave of the irate lady and continued on the trail to Two Rivers, he pondered over the whole problem. Aside from the fact that Lyndia's story of her having been sold to Sladen had been corroborated, but one other fact had been established. That was: Peter Kolsar had definitely not participated in the killing of Bill Sladen. The question now was, who had fired the second bullet?

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE NEXT ISSUE.



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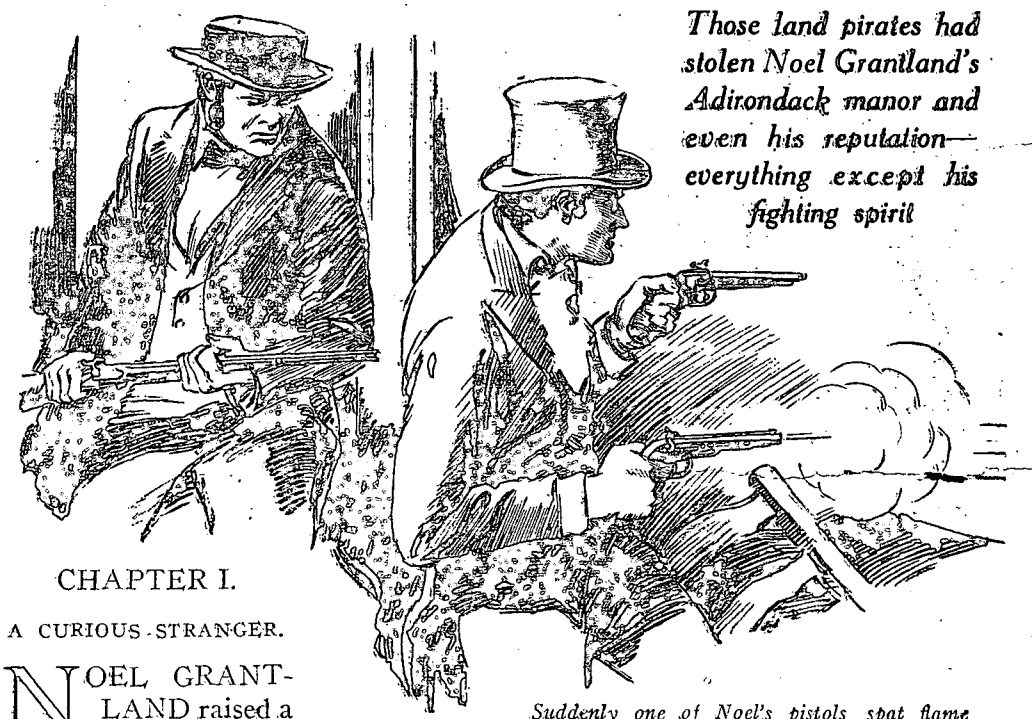
By Thundering Fist

By WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE
Author of "The Siege of Ste. Anne," "The Adirondack Hoard," etc.

Novelette—Complete

Those land pirates had stolen Noel Grantland's Adirondack manor and even his reputation—everything except his fighting spirit



Suddenly one of Noel's pistols spat flame

CHAPTER I.

A CURIOUS STRANGER.

NOEL GRANTLAND raised a long, muscular hand to his head, where the worst ache was, and with clenched teeth felt of the wound there. A thick skull had saved him. So much for that. He was in a ditch, and it was dawn. He sat up and remembered. This was one of the broad fields which yesterday had belonged to him. Last night he had been a rich landholder: this morning his three thousand fair acres were in the possession of an enemy who had come down upon him like a thunderbolt from a blue sky.

Grantland blinked at the first pale glory of sunrise, spreading above the Adirondack wilderness. Range on range of mountains were still dark against the sky as he got stiffly to his feet. But in spite of a hundred sore spots he stood straight as a ramrod, and tough as hand-forged iron. The beating that he had taken eight or nine hours before had done no lasting damage.

He considered himself. His long-tailed blue coat, in the best style of 1830 and of the finest cloth that could be brought out of Montreal, had lost half its polished horn buttons. The silken soft linen of his ruffled shirt was torn

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and soiled. A black satin stock rode high under one ear. He could not have been worse handled if he had been in a tavern brawl with the lake boatman.

Grantland pushed back long, dark brown hair that was trimmed and turned to roll on his collar, after the fashion of the day. He knew that the nasty scalp wound ought to be dressed, but he was in no mood for a visit to the surgeon's office, with its gruesome skeleton and its unholy relics preserved in alcohol. A fate which he did not yet understand had tossed him onto the scrap heap and the very fibres of his soul cried out for vengeance.

The sound of a patently artificial cough brought Grantland's head up suddenly. At the top of the ditch he saw a broad and honest face looking down at him. One of the calm blue eyes wore a ring of black and the never handsome nose was swollen like a puff-ball. But not even these grotesque decorations could make any difference in that face. It was as reliable as the granite foundations of the mighty hills.

"Tom Phelps!" cried Grantland. "The last time I saw you the outlander scum were putting the boots to you!"

"Oh, aye, Mr. Noel! They do be kind of rough, but they ain't scienced. I took a dozen of 'em with the grape-vine holt, and the cross-buttocks, and flang 'em agin the wall so hard they couldn't get up!"

"My head sounds like a music box!" said Grantland, as he climbed to the top of the ditch. "I ought to be at home now, with Zeke coming up to draw the bed curtains and tell me it's a fine, fair day! I remember the fight . . . but how did I get here?"

"On my back, sir, begging pardon for the liberty I took. But it was a stout crack Mr. Everard give you, with the butt of a horse pistol. I got 'im with the flying mare, and he went over my head. And if it hadn't been for the luck of his falling on another of the

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villains they'd be hammering together a coffin for Mr. James Everard now!"

"You tried, anyway! I remember how he came in, insolent, and . . ."

"I was there, Mr. Noel, wanting to know if I should put the roan colt to the dogcart for ye, or would you ride Sancho. In he comes, saying he was James Everard of New York and pushing by Zeke, bold as brass. Right into a gentleman's dining room! With Sheriff Tyson behind him and all them plug-ugly servants in livery crowding into the hallway.

"'What do you want here, sir?' says you, getting up from table. 'The estate called Grantlands,' says he. 'It has been sold this day for taxes at the courthouse in Crocusville and I am the new owner.' 'You lie!' says you, and you laid him flat with as pretty a right hand blow as ever I see! It minded me of the time I fought the Liverpool Tiger forty round—"

"And so they pitched us out! Didn't our people fight?"

"Oh, aye! Some fit and some run! But them that run might have stood like a British square if they hadn't been took so sudden. Don't hold it agin 'em, sir!"

"Tom," said Grantland, suddenly. "Can you steal me a horse from the stables? And one for yourself? Get me Sancho if you can. If not, the bay mare, Betsy. She's almost as fast and there's just as much bottom in her."

"I'll bring them hosses if I have to break a jaw or two, Mr. Noel! But . . . but you ain't going away? You ain't going to give up Grantlands?"

"Egad! Not while you and I can swing a fist, Tom!"

"I'll get ye six hosses, sir!"

"You get yourself back here with all your legs and arms!" laughed Noel.

"Aye, sir!"

Tom, grinning, rose and shook the whole hard two hundred and twenty pounds of him; he looked like a faithful dog coming out of the water. He would bring the horses. Brought up in the service of Noel's father, he had left the family just once—to spend a few years in cities as a bare knuckle fighter under the London prize ring rules.

As the broad back of Phelps disappeared, Noel tried to take account of the situation. In the spring, not so long past, he had sent the money to pay his taxes to the treasurer at the county seat by a neighbor, one Ezra Goddard. This was not a rare proceeding. Except in the time of settled weather, journeys were difficult and only the few turnpikes could really be called roads. Business was done, among people who knew each other, largely by cash and pledged word. And Goddard, while no intimate of Grantland, was at least a man of property and some standing.

If taxes were returned from the county to the State treasurer as unpaid a man's land could be advertised, sold at auction, and seized. Grantland had known nothing of any such action. Last night this stranger had appeared, backed by the sheriff. The whole affair smelled to heaven of trickery and fraud. Noel had work before him both for fists and brain.

A FAMILIAR nicker brought him back to the moment. Tom, beaming, dismounted from as pretty a bay mare as ever man put a leg over. And he had led a flashing eyed black horse that pushed forward and nosed Grantland with little snorts and blowings of pleasure.

"Sancho and Betsy were both glad to see me, sir. They don't like the smell of them outlanders; nor of a great pen

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full of dogs they got there! A kind of a wagon it is, on wheels, with the dogs howling fit to give a man the shivers. Hungry, I guess they be by the sound."

"How about the new grooms?" asked Noel, smiling at a glistening trickle of blood along Tom's knuckles.

"They's one that won't chew no beef for a day or two. But I didn't have no real trouble, Mr. Noel. I hooked 'im the way I done to Black Cloud, the Jamaica nigger—"

"Let's go!" interrupted Noel, for he had heard every one of Phelps's ring stories at least a hundred times. "We need a steak and a quart or two of ale for this day's work!"

Sancho took the ditch as though he had springs under him and Grantland galloped down the hard dirt road with something of the lilting June morning creeping into his heart. He was a fighting man, with something to fight for.

The sun had just changed from a flaming rose to a shield of burnished gold when Grantland and his man galloped up to a long wooden tavern that looked out over the waters of Lake Champlain, now touched by the morning to a myriad diamond points.

At the sound of hoofs and the creak of saddle leather the host, who looked like nothing so much as a currant bun, came waddling out; and when he saw Grantland he began to give his pudgy hands a waterless bath. Phineas Flack recognized one of the great men of the countryside.

"Stable and feed both horses," said Noel, briefly, as he dropped to the ground. "And for us a two-inch steak, broiled, not fried, mind you! And a gallon of ale!"

"Yes, sir! Yes, Mr. Grantland! Walk in and you'll be served with the best!"

Stable boys came running, and Flack went backward through the doorway leading into the taproom. If he wondered why the master of Grantlands was abroad so early, and eating under the roof of a tavern, he did not dare to ask.

The taproom was empty save for a lean, hard bitten, black mustached man of perhaps forty, who sat at one of the tables staring straight into vacancy. A stranger in that country was rare enough, and a stranger with some subtle foreign air of distinction about him was worthy of remark. But Landlord Flack scowled as he glanced at the staring man.

"Will you eat alone, Mr. Grantland?" asked Flack.

"No, Phelps eats with me. Who is that man over there?"

"I'll have him out directly, sir. He's been sitting all night with empty pockets, and there's no profit in that for me!"

The landlord walked over to the stranger's table and rapped with his knuckles on the scarred wood.

"Wake up!" he snapped. "You'll have to go now! One of the gentry's come in!"

Without even deigning to look at Flack the man rose slowly and stepped away from the table. Noel, watching him, saw that his grimed nankeen breeches fitted like gloves and that the shoulders under a threadbare coat of broadcloth had known the drillmaster. This was no tramp. The stranger took three careful steps, reeled, and would have fallen if Phelps had not sprung up and caught him. His face had gone dead white, but he had not lost consciousness.

"*Bitte* . . ." he murmured, "please . . . *ein glass wasser* . . ."

"Why, I believe the man's hungry!" cried Noel, indignantly. "Get a mug

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of hot rum into him, Flack, and then fill him up with good soup! And be quick about it!"

Tom guided the stranger back to his own table and Noel went through his own pockets until he found a golden eagle. He put it down.

"Eat well and drink hearty!" he said with a gesture of salute.

The man's dulled eyes lifted. With an effort that brought the sweat of keakness to his lined forehead he got up and bowed from the waist.

"*Ich danke* . . . I thank you, sir!"

GRANTLAND and Tom returned to their own place and ate with the appetite of men who lived under the sky most of the time when they were not in their beds. There was little room in their thoughts for the stranger, now that he was fed.

Near the end of the meal another man came into the taproom of Flack's tavern; and this was a man to draw the eye anywhere that he would be allowed to go. More, one felt like moving so that the back would be against a wall in case of need.

In his semi-respectable affairs Black Mike Barnaby posed as a lake smuggler; actually he was known to be leader of the longshore riff-raff, pirate when chance offered, and unhanged only because no major crime had been fastened upon him.

His oily black head was set, with scarcely any neck, on a pair of rounded shoulders which would have done credit to a gorilla. Now Barnaby hitched up his jean pantaloons and grinned faintly at Grantland and Phelps as he passed through the room and into the kitchen beyond. Insolence to a Grantland from any one was an unheard-of thing; and that one of the lake riff-raff should dare it was preposterous. Tom Phelps started to rise, with a face the color of raw beef. Suddenly Noel laughed.

"Sit down, Tom!" he said. "You have already skinned your knuckles once this morning! Probably Black Mike has heard that I'm a landless man to-day, and he's enjoying the thought."

A moment later, just as they had finished, Flack came hurrying in. The man had undergone a startling change. The folds of fat which were his face now sagged in lugubrious lines and he no longer washed his hands. With a glance over his shoulder at the thick form of Black Mike, who had appeared in the kitchen doorway, he spoke.

"The score is a dollar four shilling, hosses and men."

"Aye," replied Noel, surprised that he should be asked to pay cash. He felt in his pockets and remembered that he had given his only coin to the stranger. "Charge it to me."

"No trust or we bust," replied Flack, but he moved backward apprehensively as he spoke. "I'll have to keep them hosses, I guess, until you pay up!"

NOEL GRANTLAND merely gasped, and stood staring. To be refused credit was an experience he had never before known. Then he realized that Tom Phelps, growling like a thoroughly insulted bulldog, was worrying Landlord Flack; cuffing him, tapping him on his enormous stomach, tweaking his rotund button of a nose. And also Grantland saw that Black Mike Barnaby was edging into the room, with an ugly looking knife showing in his hand.

Noel came out of his paralysis. Like a leaping flame he shot across the

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room, pirouetted as light as a dancer on one foot, and drove the other straight into the face of Barnaby. Black Mike had probably never heard of offensive fighting like that. He stretched his length on the floor, and his head hit with the sound of a bung starter against a barrel.

"Well struck, sir!" The lean stranger was standing, with a pocket pistol in his hand. He put it hastily out of sight. "I apologize for drawing the firearms! But these pigdogs, they are so enormous! One should have a saber for them! And now you will permit, sir, that I offer you some of your own money?"

He bowed and pointed to the heap of change which Flack had brought from Grantland's ten dollar gold piece. Noel turned and caught the landlord just as he broke away from Tom, to run whimpering for the kitchen.

"Here!" Grantland swept up a handful of silver and showered it over Flack's head. "Now bring the horses, before I roll you and your house into the lake!"

Then Noel turned and offered his hand to the stranger.

"Sir," he said, "you have my sincere thanks. I am Noel Grantland, of Grantlands."

"And I, I am Johann von Hohenstein. At your service, Herr von Grantlands!"

"Unfortunately I am at present dispossessed," said Noel. "Later I shall be glad to offer you the hospitality of Grantlands."

"And I shall look forward to that day with pleasure!"

They bowed ceremoniously and Grantland went out of the taproom with Tom at his heels. At any other time he would have been tremendously interested in this well bred and mysterious foreigner, but now trouble rode him too hard for any other concern.

"Where now, sir?" asked Tom, as a round eyed stable boy brought the horses.

"To call on Miss Diane," replied Noel, slowly, "although it's no hour for calling on a lady. And after that—to war!"

At the thought of Diane Towers, milk white and crowned by a glory of hair that was like a dark flame, Grantland took heart again. The sudden change in Phineas Flack had brought home to Noel the difference between Grantland of Grantlands and a rumpled young gentleman without a dollar to his name.

But there was Diane, who had given him more than a little encouragement to hope that she would let him make her mistress of Grantlands. What was more, he had just downed the bully of the lake pirates with that marvelous *savate* which he had learned in Paris while he was on the Grand Tour. And it was June, with joy in every fresh green leaf. Even Sancho snorted as they cantered on through the countryside.

CHAPTER II.

UNPLEASANT VISITS.

DIANE TOWERS had been left with a few rocky acres, a rattletrap mansion, and a futile aunt to bring her up. Noel had never waited in the shabby parlor, with its tarnished gilt cornices above the windows and its lumpy haircloth furniture, without thinking how much Diane would enjoy the silver and mahogany of Grantlands.

To-day his thoughts were the same, and not until she stood in the doorway did it come home to him that this day

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Grantlands was not his to offer. She stared at him as she crossed the room, speculatively, while little spots of color glowed in the clear white of her cheeks. Her hand lay unresponsive in his.

"I've heard," she said, "about Grantlands. From Sambo, my hostler."

"I awakened in a ditch!" Noel managed to laugh. "There's work for me to-day, but I wanted to see you first!"

"Yes?"

"I . . . I thought . . ." he stammered.

"You thought what?"

"Diane, haven't you any good word for me? Of encouragement?"

"You've let yourself be tricked out of a fortune and you come running to a woman for a 'good word'!" she blazed. "Come when you haven't slept in a ditch! Come when you've proven yourself a better man than the one who tricked you!"

"Then," Noel drew a deep and long breath, "it was the land you cared for!"

"Land? Yes, or money! Or . . . a title! Lud, Noel, a girl must marry something besides a long tailed coat and a beaver hat!"

"I'm glad I came," said Grantland, in a low voice. He walked toward the door. "Good-by, Diane!"

Noel found himself mounting Sancho again, with Tom Phelps's worried glance searching his face.

"I'm making a pleasant round of calls, Tom," he said. "The next is to be on Ezra Goddard."

Fifteen minutes later Grantland was facing a dried, slightly stooped man of middle years who wore a snuff colored coat, it was said, because snuff did not show on the fabric. Goddard was uncomfortable. He had not been able to answer questions with any degree of satisfaction to Noel Grantland.

"I think you're lying with every second breath!" exclaimed Noel, at last. "You don't dare to deny that I gave you the money! All in gold, it was, in a canvas sack. But you're vague about that, and there you stop remembering! You don't recall that it happened when you came to see about buying my wool, at sheep shearing time! You can't remember that it was you, not I, who proposed that you save me the long ride to Crocusville, in the spring mud, because you had to make the trip anyway!

"You aren't sure whether Hiram Barclay, the county treasurer, gave you a tax receipt. You haven't it now! You supposed I had gone and got my receipt! So I should. But I didn't! And you can't exactly be sure about having given him the money, but you must if you had it! You're too cunning for me, you fox, but I can do one thing! I can give you something that you will remember!"

With one hand Grantland took Ezra Goddard by the neckerchief and lifted him clear of the floor; with the other he laid on his riding crop until Goddard squawked like a frightened chicken. When the crop broke, Noel flung him down across a table and went out of the house with bootheels clattering defiance.

"Tom, it's a plot!" said Noel as he vaulted to the saddle again. "Goddard's in it, and likely enough half a dozen others. Grantlands is the best prize in the county for a tax fraud! We're riding to Crocusville!"

HIRAM BARCLAY, county treasurer, was a pot-bellied man with bulging eyes. It was impossible to tell from his expression whether he was indignant or terrified when Noel Grantland came striding into his office with a face like a thundercloud.

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Sheriff Tyson had been leaning on the counter. He straightened up and sent a stream of tobacco juice accurately into a corner; then pulled thoughtfully at a drooping mustache as he regarded Noel from under half-closed lids. An unclean man in a butternut shirt, whose only virtue was his badge of office.

"Barclay," began Noel without preliminaries, "soon after the fifteenth of May last did Ezra Goddard come here and pay, for me, the State and county taxes on Grantlands?"

Barclay cleared his throat. A glance passed between him and the sheriff. Tyson stepped to the doorway, looked out, and raised his arm aloft. But Noel was too furious to take thought of what the sheriff did.

"Mr. Grantland!" Barclay struggled to be impassive. "The record shows that the taxes on your property for the past year remained unpaid beyond the legal extension of time. Therefore sale at public auction and seizure have followed by due process of law. The property was bid in by one James Everard of New York and possession was taken, as you have reason to know, last night!"

"Public auction!" choked Noel. "Public to you and this outlander Everard! And your tool, the sheriff! Why wasn't the property advertised? Why wasn't I notified?"

"No personal notice is required under the law. The property was advertised in the Saratoga *Gazette!*"

"Ha! In a paper that doesn't come within two days' journey of this place! It was not in the tax sales in the Crocusville *Banner!* Who's in this plot, besides you four?"

"Be careful!" warned Barclay. The sheriff stepped nearer.

Noel Grantland had never been accused, in his thirty years, of being a patient man; and more than anything else he hated a liar.

He spun on his heel suddenly and his fist landed on the jaw of Sheriff Tyson with a sound like a breaking board. The sheriff was unconscious before he reached the floor. And almost as he fell Grantland settled himself on the counter, with the treasurer across his lap. His hard right hand rose and fell steadily. A medley of whacks, squeals of pain, and yells for help poured out into the quiet summer morning.

Noel had just tossed Barclay back into his chair when the doorway darkened. Then he realized that a man cannot knock out sheriffs and spank county treasurers without getting into trouble. This pocket army consisted of deputy sheriffs, some of whom he knew and some of whom had undoubtedly been provided to quell the possible wrath of Noel Grantland.

With a vain regret that good Tom Phelps was not beside him, Noel started the fight. The deputies finished it in less than five minutes, and Noel's last memory was of a hickory club that swung down toward his head.

CHAPTER III.

THROUGH THE BARS.

GRANTLAND awoke with a fresh headache and the consciousness that he was lying on something most uncomfortably hard. Before he opened his eyes an exploring hand assured him that there was a stone floor under him; and when he sat up, blinking, he was not surprised to find himself looking at the iron bars of a cell door. They had put him into the county jail.

Slowly Noel's head turned on a very

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stiff neck, and he met with real astonishment. An old gentleman, dignified even though he was sitting on a wooden stool, contemplated the prisoner. White hair and immaculate black broadcloth could not quite smother the twinkle that dwelt in a very young pair of eyes. Grantland found it hard to believe that this was Judge Abram Carstairs, friend of his father, visiting him in jail.

"If," began the old gentleman impressively, "if you were twins, Noel, they'd have to call a general muster and get out the militia!"

"Judge Carstairs," replied Noel, grinning in momentary forgetfulness of his myriad aches and pains, "when I opened my eyes and saw you in the same place with me I knew I couldn't be dead! We wouldn't be together. But I thought I had delirium!"

"You may wish you were dead," said the judge, gravely, "although I hope it won't come to that. As I find that you are little damaged in body, and in no need of nursing, I feel I must tell you that the situation is extremely serious. Charges have been preferred against you by Goddard, Tyson, and Barclay. In the Goddard case you are held without bail because he asserts he was attacked 'with a deadly weapon.' They have attached your account at the bank, pending the outcome of various civil actions. My boy, you should have come to me in the first place for an investigation of the sale of your property."

"Well, sir, we've been used to fighting—"

"The thundering fist! I know! With your father it was pistols, and with your grandfather the sword! Where are you now? Can you lift yourself out of jail by your own bootstraps?"

"Somehow I will!" answered Noel.

"Well, I'll defend you," Judge Carstairs assured him. "Egad, sir! They're even trying to get your man Phelps as an accessory!"

This sobered Noel to an understanding of his position. Judge Carstairs was willing to pay fines and damages for the prisoner, if need be, in almost any amount, but his political ear was to the ground and he was of the opinion that since Grantland had refused to take the loss of his property lying down the coterie in control of county offices would try to lock him up for as long as possible. Of James Everard the judge knew nothing, but he promised to find out what he could.

JUDGE CARSTAIRS left. A little barred square of sunlight beat cheerfully in upon the stone floor beside Noel, lying stretched out on the bundle of straw that was furnished prisoners for a bed. The sunlight did not cheer him. At noon a lethargic turnkey brought him a jug of water, half a loaf of bread and a bowl of some thin steaming liquid which seemed to be meant for soup. Hunger forced the prisoner to eat.

With even such food warming him Grantland felt better. He rose and leaned on the ledge of his barred window, looking out across the courthouse green toward the turnpike. There horse and foot passengers mingled with cart and wagon, chaise and coach. Suddenly Noel gripped the iron rods in front of his face and tried to shake them free of the brickwork.

For he had just seen Diane Towers pass by, the long skirt of her bottle green habit sweeping the flank of a magnificent gray horse which he had given her not three months before. Horse and girl were both conscious of the picture they made for the villagers.

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There was not a head that did not turn for another look at the coppery flame of Diane's hair and the form that was revealed by the tight green bodice.

But it was not alone the sight of Diane that set Grantland's fingers against the bars until they went white. Beside her rode a stranger; tall, with curling dark hair and a disdainful eye. He sat his horse well, this outlander, and he was dressed in the height of fashion. His beaver hat sat cockily just a little to one side. A cluster of sparkling fobs and seals showed at the edge of a tight buttoned coat.

But there was nothing of the effeminate dandy about the man. A glance said that he was as hard as nails; nor was any label needed to tell Grantland that this was James Everard, Esquire, now of Grantlands. Trust Diane, the huntress, to bag him on the first day of his occupancy. She would have fallen from her sidesaddle at his very feet if there were no better way.

Until this moment Noel had been able to think with a degree of calm, although his mood had bordered on despair. The stiff and crackling roll of bank notes which Judge Carstairs had left might serve to bribe the turnkey at supper time. Now this intelligent calm was shattered. He was ready to tear down the walls with his hands.

He searched for a tool of some kind. There was nothing in the cell but the earthen jug and bowl. Even the stool had been taken out when Judge Carstairs left. They had gone through his pockets and taken his knife; the keys on his ring were useless for digging into a brick wall.

Then Noel thought of his stock, which had more than once goaded him with a protruding piece of whalebone. He ripped it off, worked out one of the tough whalebone supports. A moment later he was digging with rage driven fingers at the mortar between the bricks of the window. He kept an ear open for steps along the corridor, but . . . bad luck to the man who tried to stop him now!

Noel had thought of Tom Phelps more than once, and each time given speculation up as useless. That Tom had not come to the rescue in the battle with the sheriff's men seemed strange and yet there must have been a good reason. Certainly Phelps was not in jail or Judge Carstairs would have known it.

WHEN darkness came there was no turnkey, and no supper; and Grantland understood that he was to be fed only once a day. So much the better now. He ate what was left of the bread, drank his last swallow of water, and went to work on the window again. Three bricks were loose but it might take all night to stir the bars from their sockets.

In one of those brief periods in which he rested tired wrists and numbed fingers he heard the sound of a footstep outside. He alternated between hope and fear while a dark, round object raised itself against the light of the stars. It resolved itself into a man's head, and a husky voice whispered out of the night.

"Be that you, Mr. Noel, a-scratching away at them bricks?"

"Tom! Thank God you've come!"

"I couldn't do no better, sir," said Phelps. "Them deputies had pistols and, thinks I, I won't be no use to Mr. Noel with three, four pounds of lead in me. So I made off with the hosses and come back as soon as it got dark."

"Did you bring a pinch bar, or anything to work with?"

"Why, shucks, Mr. Noel! Them

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little bars in the winder won't give me no trouble! They ain't bigger'n my finger!"

Two mighty hands came in between the iron rods. They curled and closed. For a moment there was silence, broken only by the scraping of Phelps's feet as he braced himself. Then bricks and iron rasped hoarsely. With a groan two bars left their sockets and disappeared. Panting, Tom reached for two more. In less than a minute Noel was crawling through the window on his stomach. He stood outside, with the good earth under his feet and his face lifted in brief thanksgiving to the star-sprinkled heavens.

"Come on, Mr. Noel!" whispered Tom. "The hosses is waiting in a clump of alders jest outside the town, and it ain't a healthy place for us here!"

They skirted the white pillared courthouse and made their way by alleys and back yards out of Crocusville. Sancho whinnied faintly from the alders. Then Grantland was on his back, riding knee to knee with Tom Phelps toward freedom.

"Where now, sir?" asked Tom. "Was you thinking of sleeping somewheres?"

Grantland laughed, partly at the stifled yearning in Tom's voice and partly at the joy of having horseflesh under him again and another chance at his enemies.

"Tom!" he cried, "I'm a fugitive from justice, and you're no better!"

"Right you be, sir! I was wondering if we couldn't steal a hen somewheres for supper? From a place where they got plenty?"

Noel rolled in his saddle and pounded Tom on one thick muscled shoulder.

"You've got the makings of a fine rogue, Tom! But I'm aiming higher than a hen roost!"

"A Grantland can't do nothing really wrong!" muttered Phelps, stubbornly.

"You'll see!" laughed Noel. "We're going to join the pirates, you and I! Where do Black Mike Barnaby and his gang make their headquarters?"

"Well, sir, they do say him and Flack is mortal thick. But they wouldn't durst to do business there. Mike's got a boat, the Black Hawk, and she's moored in Partridge Harbor, nigh Bessboro, a good deal. I've heerd he's got a shack on the lake shore there. It's kind of a hid place."

"That's where we're going, then!" cried Grantland. "And we'll dine or die with the pirates!"

CHAPTER IV.

PIRATES' DEN.

IT was close to midnight when Grantland and Tom, their horses tethered beside a road that was little more than two wheel tracks through the forest, drew near on foot to the top of the cliff that overhung the sandy beach of Partridge Harbor.

Down in the tiny, landlocked inlet a big sloop rode at her moorings, dark except for a dull gleam through the cabin ports. On the edge of the cliff a long, low building gave forth ribald sounds to the night. A sentry slouched back and forth along the cliff edge.

Five minutes later that sentry was bound and gagged. Tom Phelps had his musket and Grantland the two pistols they had found on him. With a last few words of whispered instructions to Phelps, Noel walked up to the half-open door of the shack and looked in.

Black Mike's gang was making a

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night of it, and the two score men there were noisy enough for a hundred. The walls of the big room were lined with bunks and here lay at least a dozen sprawled figures, singing, snoring, cursing themselves and everything else between the nether regions and high heaven.

Down the length of the room ran an oaken table. Here were all those who were nearly sober, half sober, or maniac drunk but still able to handle their bodies. They lolled over the table; pounding, roaring witlessly, singing. A half eaten feast of venison, duck and partridge was before them; and a keg of the best French brandy was trestled up in the center of the board.

Black Mike Barnaby presided, his hair shining with bear's grease and an ugly smirk twisting the mouth where Grantland had set his bootheel. He would not easily forgive that bulbous nose and those swollen lips.

Noel took the breath of a man about to dive. Then he walked steadily into that room with hands hanging weaponless at his sides.

Black Mike was the first to see him. The pirate's bruised lips parted, he half rose; and then sank down again upon his bench with a gleam in his eye which announced his intentions more plainly than any words.

A bulging giant, whom Noel knew vaguely by sight as Two Finger Pete, was next to notice the intruder. He stood up and gaped. Then one by one the heads turned and the room became silent. Every pair of eyes was fastened upon the slim figure of Grantland as he reached the head of the table and faced Black Mike Barnaby.

Now Black Mike stood up. Face to face with Noel a little of his triumphant assurance left him and a terrible rage took its place. He snarled like a cornered wildcat, and his hand went to his knife.

Instantly the long hands of Grantland crossed over his chest, the lapels of his coat flipped back, and the pistols captured from the sentry came out of breast pockets. Barnaby stared at them.

"Sit down!" roared Noel. "Sit down or I'll spatter your brains on the floor!"

WHILE a man could count five slowly, there was no sound in that room but the drag and wheeze of heavy breathing. Even the maudlin singers in the bunks seemed to realize the presence of something more potent than the brandy they had drunk.

Gradually the knees of Black Mike Barnaby yielded and he sank down upon the bench he had just left. His fingers dropped away from his knife.

Without the loss of a second Grantland sprang onto an empty bunk from which he could cover Barnaby and all the length of the room. In the doorway he saw Tom, according to orders, musket in hand. The shoulders of the old boxer filled that space from side to side, and his head brushed the lintel.

This was Noel's moment, and he caught it with a firm grip before it drifted to an anticlimax.

"Men!" he cried, in a voice that rang against the walls. "I am an outlaw! I have to-day broken jail at Crocusville and to-morrow they'll be hunting me with a posse and dogs! Most of you know me! Most of you know an outlander has stolen my home! But I'm going to drive him out of this county or into the next world if I swing for it! He's got an army of servants, but there's loot at Grantlands! I left five thousand dollars in gold in my strongbox! It's yours if you'll come with me and get it! Who'll come?"

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The silence held after Noel had finished. A long sigh went the length of the table. In a day when five cents would buy a pound of butter or a pint of whisky, five thousand dollars was a fortune.

Two Finger Pete rose slowly, with his knuckles resting on the table top. Hair grew up his bared chest to his throat, and rumpled brushes of it ran out of his ears.

"Ay go wit' you," he said. "Me, Pete! Ay go!"

Suddenly one of Noel's pistols spat smoke and flame. Black Mike's knife left his hand and struck the floor with singing blade. Mike nursed his fingers.

"Barnaby," said Noel, quietly, "you are either with me or against me! If you're against me, I'll see to it that the lake pickerel nibble your ears before morning!"

"Ay like dat talk," announced Two Finger Pete. "Ay tink you better all go, boys!"

Somebody, with a yell, tossed a bottle of rum to Grantland. He dropped his smoking pistol, caught the bottle, and knocked the top off with a deft blow. Then he filled a great crockery bowl and turned to Black Mike.

"Drink with me, Mike," he said. "I'm only borrowing your men for a night!"

Barnaby hesitated, took the bowl and tipped his head back for a long pull. Noel took it after him, and drained it. Outwardly, at least, there was truce between them. Together they met the clamoring men, and made plans.

LATE the next day Grantland and Tom sat their restive horses outside the pirate rendezvous and exchanged a few final words with Black Mike, Two Finger Pete, and their band of cutthroats. Noel and Phelps were to go first to Grantlands and find out approximately the number of men there, and the best hour and manner of attack. Meantime the men were to march to Flack's tavern and await orders there.

Noel was glad to leave his new henchmen, after a night and a day of them, and gallop into the sweet smelling forest with Tom beside him. A long ride and a hard fight, and, he hoped, he would either be dead or master of Grantlands once more. It was in his mind that he could force the truth from James Everard. But, failing that, his plight could hardly be worse than it was now.

Grantlands, when the two horsemen drew near, was ablaze with light from dormered roof to basement kitchen. They could see that much, even from the highway. When they had hidden the horses safely Noel and Phelps moved cautiously through the enormous garden, among snowball and syringa bushes, past white painted arbors of roses and gnarled lilac trees.

Reluctantly Tom obeyed when Grantland told him to wait in the vegetable garden, a few hundred feet from the kitchen entrance. Mumbling protests, he forced his vast frame into a hedge of cedar and disappeared.

In circling to approach the kitchen from an angle so that he could glance in through a window before attempting to enter, Noel was forced to go rather close to an enormous, wagon-like contrivance which had been drawn up near the stables. Without warning a long, bloodcurdling howl rose into the night. Noel sheered away; never before, even from the throat of a hungry timber wolf or marauding panther, had he heard a sound like that.

"Dogs!" he muttered, remembering

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Tom's report after he had stolen Sancho and Betsy. "Devils more like, by the sound!"

Nothing happened, however, and Grantland went on convinced that, dogs or devils, the creatures were safely penned for the present, at least.

The clatter of knives on plates came from the servants' dining room, far to his right. From the brilliant lights in the dining room he knew that they must be at dinner above stairs, also. There should be a reasonable chance for him to get into the kitchen and thence to the cellar. It was the easiest way to enter the maze of underground rooms known generally as the "cellar," and there lay his best hope of spying successfully on the usurper Everard. From the cellar, he remembered, there was at least one ancient way of getting to the top of the house.

There was no one but a scullery wench in the kitchen, kneeling before the great cooking fireplace. At least she seemed to be that from her ragged bodice, and the torn skirt looped high to be out of the way. Her back was toward the door, but Grantland could see a shapely, crock-smudged arm that turned the spit on which a great joint of beef was roasting.

"Turn the spit!" she was murmuring to herself. "Turn the spit and turn the hour glass! Wash the crocks and turn the spit! And scrub the floor! And turn the spit! Oh, lud!"

HE ought to be able to slip past her to the cellar door. He was halfway across the kitchen when without warning she sprang up and stared at him with wide, dark brown eyes. Caught! With no money to bribe her. And he could not very well lay a pistol butt over her head and take her with him into the cellar. Her hair was the color of honey. But something had to be done, and so Noel said the first thing that came into his head.

"You," he told her solemnly, "have the neatest ankle and the prettiest leg with which Heaven has ever blest my vision!"

Two dimples twinkled at him from suddenly flushed cheeks. She curtsied, and no lady at the Court of St. James could have done better.

"Who taught you that?" demanded Noel, forgetting for an instant that he stood in danger of death. "What's your name?"

"Mary, please you, sir. And my mother taught me to curtsy to the gentry!"

"Egad! Do you know who I am?"

"You must be the master of Grantlands, sir! I've heard tell he has long legs, and a long nose, and a way with the womenfolks and horses!"

Noel gasped and grinned, and took a step forward.

"Mary, I may die within the hour, and I could do very nicely with a kiss!"

Grantland took only one step, for he found a little kitchen knife, ground paper thin and razor sharp, pricking through the flowered silk of his waistcoat.

"Mother taught me not to kiss the gentry, sir!" dimpled Mary.

"The devil!" laughed Noel.

"And she said the gentry knew the devil very well!" added the girl. "But if you're sure you're going to die . . ."

The knife point lowered.

"I am!" said Noel, fervently, and he leaned toward her. But at that moment a footstep creaked in a corridor and the girl was dragging frantically at his sleeve.

"Run! Hide!" she panted. "Fool! Would you lose a battle and your life for a kiss?"

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"For one of yours I would!" whispered Grantland. He leaped across the room, and pulled the cellar door shut after him. Saved by a hairbreadth! In the darkness of the stairway he wiped a hot forehead. What a girl!

He pulled himself together and went down into a pitch blackness which he knew almost as well as he knew his own bedchamber. Unless his memory had played him a trick there was at least one stairway in the four-foot stone wall of the house which had not been filled in with masonry. Grantlands had been built during the French and Indian wars, and the walls had been honeycombed with loopholes for rifle fire, reached by a series of stairways.

Noel felt his way to the storeroom, opened a box of candles and lighted one with his pocket flint and steel. Three minutes later, behind a tier of apple barrels, he had found the plank door that he remembered. He opened it and began a long climb, for between the attic and the cellar all openings to the old defenses had been closed.

In the familiar, dusty attic Noel found everything apparently unchanged. He had started toward the trapdoor at the head of the attic stairs which led down into the house when, seemingly from a hair trunk not ten feet away, a voice spoke to him.

"*Bitte* . . . please, the hands up high, sir!"

CHAPTER V.

"TO THE DOGS!"

NOEL was too astounded not to obey that command. Immediately the candlelight revealed the lean, dark mustached face of Johann von Hohenstein as that gentleman rose from his concealment and bowed.

"Hell's bones!" gasped Grantland. "Are you a ghost?"

"Pardon? We are not to be enemies, sir, I hope?"

"Enemies?" Noel sat down weakly on a broken chair. "It all depends on how you feel about the man downstairs who calls himself James Everard, and who has taken my property away from me by fraud and force!"

"I shall kill him soon now," announced von Hohenstein calmly and without a change of expression. "It is for this pleasure that I have travel many miles, sir. If you interfere with me I regret I shall be forced to kill you also. I regret very much, that."

"More power to you!" exclaimed Noel, heartily. "How did you manage to get yourself here, in the attic?"

"In my country there are many castles. In Austria we always begin with the dungeons to learn the secrets of a castle. Ha! Your house is very simple! I have find at once the stairs in the wall! It have sometimes been a fort, yes?"

Grantland nodded. His thoughts were busy with Johann von Hohenstein. The man was straightforward, beyond doubt, and on a sudden impulse Noel revealed the details of his situation, and his purpose.

"Very good, sir!" cried von Hohenstein, with his first show of animation. "Go on with your plan! It will help me and I shall not be useless to you! It has not been easy for me to come at that man who is guarded by four score murderers, highwaymen, criminals of all kinds! If I go down there now and shoot him I shall be torn to pieces, in a manner most unpleasant! For he protects them all, these criminals, while they pretend to be his servants. And they serve him well!

"*Himmel!* This Everard I know

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too well! In Vienna we have gamble much. To him I lose a fortune. I have discover that he has cheat! I challenge him! Does he fight? No! I go to his hotel to cane him, and he have flee. I go home. My wife also, who have been charm by this scoundrel, is flee with him!

"He take her to Paris, to Madrid, to many cities. Always I follow. He know it. I wait for my revenge, and torture him. In Marseilles my wife is disappear, and they find her dead. Who have done this? Everard! By this he think to lose me. But he does not know the Baron Johann von Hohenstein! To hell I would follow him!

"He have come to New York, and I am close behind. But now my money is gone. I work, and wait for the chance to kill him. For now the time is come! I must go home. I have succeed to my title. It is in New York that I see these Goddard and Barclay, of your country, making fête every day with women and very much champagne.

"It is of such that Everard make his living. He is a tiger, a jackal also, ready to spring upon weakness. These countrymen play cards with him and lose money which is not their own. This is what Everard want. Now he will milk them, like the cows! He question them and learn that you are richest man in this place where they come from.

"Do you not see, Herr von Grantlands? They make a plot to plunder you and save themselves from jail! Everard is brains for them. They are the tools! Take your house from him, sir, and I will prove what have happen in New York!"

Before Baron von Hohenstein finished everything was clear to Grantland. He understood, now, what had seemed to be a particularly malevolent and undeserved attack. In desperation Barclay and Goddard, supposed to be paragons of respectability, had turned upon him in order to save themselves.

"Thank you, baron," said Noel as he rose and went to the trapdoor. "I'll go scouting now. You've set my mind at rest about the aftermath of this affair, and that was what I feared. If my men will fight as hard as they drink we'll clean Everard out of here almost as fast as he came in!"

FROM the enclosed attic stairway Grantland entered the house servants' quarters, on the dormered third floor. Here he found ample evidence that the house was strongly garrisoned at night. There were firearms in every room and extra cot beds had been placed along the corridors.

Von Hohenstein had mentioned four score men. That meant that the attacking party would be outnumbered nearly two to one, and surprise would be almost vital to success. Grantland planned to get twenty of his men into the attic and then begin a direct attack outside so that he could catch the enemy front and rear.

With great caution he went on to the second floor, where his own bedchamber was. There was no sound here and he ventured to the door of the room that he had occupied two nights ago. Everything was as usual except for a great clutter of silver brushes and scent bottles belonging to the intruder. Grantland's iron strongbox remained in its accustomed place at the head of the enormous four-posted bed.

Noel did not dare to stop now to investigate even his strongbox. First of all he must locate Everard, but he went on to the head of the great stairway

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which led down to the main hall before he heard the sound of voices. A woman's laughter, rich and musical, came to him. A man's voice joined her mirth. Noel set his teeth together. The sound came from the dining room and, unless his ears were completely at fault, Diane Towers was dining there.

Grantland considered for a moment whether it would be best to retreat the way he had come and risk getting out through the kitchen. He had learned enough now. Everard was at home. Noel knew the strength of the defense and had formed a plan of attack. He decided to slip quietly out of the front door, pick up Tom and return to Flack's tavern. They could attack just before dawn.

He was halfway across the great hall, where every candle in the crystal chandelier was lighted, when a clatter of boots and a volley of curses hit the porch outside the front door. The bell clanged; the doorknob turned. There was no time to run up the stairway. The brilliant parlors offered no refuge. Noel whirled and dashed into the library, a big room dark with black walnut wainscoting and heavy with books, and made himself as small as possible behind a case of curios.

The hall filled with the scraping of many feet. At the same time a burst of sound came through the open windows; it saturated the library with a clamor that was as if the lid had been lifted for a moment from the infernal regions. One agonized human scream rose above a medley of animal snarls and yelps. Then slowly the outburst died to a growling rumble.

Noel, horror stricken, realized that there were people in the library with him; and thanked his luck for the dim light there and the shadows of his corner. He peered around the edge of the case of curios in time to see Everard take his stand in front of the fireplace, with his merciless hawk eyes directed at a little group of men who faced him.

In the center of that group, sickly green of face and sweating, stood Black Mike Barnaby. Two stalwart servants held each arm. The pirate leader's hair, which had been so brave with bear's grease, hung in lank driblets about his ears. His knees beat a tattoo against each other.

"GOOD evening, my man," said Everard, with a sneer. "Did you come to call?"

"I . . . I . . . I come to s-see you, sir!" chattered Black Mike.

"You mean you've been prowling," remarked Everard, in a voice like doom. "Who are you?"

"I know that man, James!" said Diane, from the doorway of the dining room. "He's a pirate called Black Mike Barnaby, and a thorn in the flesh of every landholder hereabouts!"

"Ah, thank you, Diane! The thorn is about to be removed!"

At this moment a man with a tremendously broad pair of shoulders and a cauliflower ear came in from out of doors. At sight of him Black Mike squirmed and emitted a squeal of sheer terror.

"Shoot me!" he begged of Everard. "Don't let him do to me what he done to Abner Meggs!"

"What about this, Blodgett?" asked Everard, addressing the man who had just entered.

"They was two of 'em," replied Blodgett, with scarcely a movement of his lipless mouth. "Caught nigh the stables. I saved this one account of I thought you might want to ast him some questions."

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"Quite right! Just for Barnaby's benefit tell me what happened to the other man."

"He fell into the dog pen, sir."

"Barnaby," said Everard, slowly, "how would you like to fall into the dog pen?"

"Oh, my Lord!" Black Mike was livid. "Don't do that!"

"Perhaps not. Why did you come here?"

"Mr. Everard, lemme tell you!" Barnaby's tongue tripped and stumbled in its eagerness to save him. "Lemme tell you! Grantland has bamboozled my men so's they'll foller him anywheres! He's a-going to try to capture this place to-night! He come ahead of me to look the ground over and mebbe he's around here now! I was just trying to come and warn you, sir, when these fellers jumped on me and poor Abner, and—"

"Wait!" interrupted Everard, harshly. "Why didn't you turn him over to the authorities instead of coming to me? Don't you know there's five hundred dollars on his head?"

"Aye, sir! But he give me this face I got, in a fight. I want him done in proper and I knowed you'd do it! If he's ketched by the law they'll put him back in jail!"

"Diane," said Everard, "what do you make of this story?"

"It sounds true to me," she answered, thoughtfully. "It's characteristic of Noel."

"Barnaby, will you stay and fight with us?"

"Yes, sir! Oh, yes, sir!" promised Black Mike, fervently.

"Very well, then! See that you do fight! I offered the reward for Grantland and I'll pay it to you now. For he's as good as taken if he attacks here. Blodgett, serve out muskets and ten rounds of powder and ball. Post a guard. Search the grounds yourself. If you can pick up Grantland there'll be five hundred for you, too. That's all!"

The men filed out, all except Black Mike. With an impatient gesture Everard went to a drawer in a highboy and took out some rolls of coins.

"Here are your thirty pieces of silver," he said with a laugh.

Diane laid her hand on his arm.

"After this disturbance, James, I'm afraid you'll be in no mood for my singing!" she exclaimed softly.

"I shall always be in the mood for your singing, my dear," replied Everard. "Let's go into the parlor."

THE library was empty again. Noel stood up, with creaking joints and wrath in his heart. There were two throats which his fingers ached to clutch. One was covered by the thick and stubbly hide of Black Mike Barnaby and the other by the velvet soft flesh of Diane.

His task now was to get out of the house and back to Tom as soon as possible. They must ride hard for the tavern, for it was impossible to tell what seeds of discontent and treachery Black Mike had scattered before he left.

Noel went softly into the dining room, cleared and empty of servants now; he moved past the great sideboard with its gleaming silver and on into the butler's pantry. He was about to go down the stairway to the kitchen when he heard a light tap-tap of footsteps coming up.

Instantly he leaped for the servants' stairway to the floors above, which also opened into the pantry. He reached the top and turned, waiting and watching the door at the foot of the stairs, which he had closed behind him. Softly

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the latch lifted and Noel dodged out of sight around the nearest corner.

A moment later a slim figure, booted, pantalooned, came up into the corridor and paused with a glance to right and left. The dress and form were those of a well grown youth but the face was the face of the scullery maid, Mary. She went noiselessly toward the front of the house and turned in at the door of the master's chamber.

Instantly Grantland followed. He could get out at any time now, he thought, since he was so near the attic; and if there were still another plotter in this house he wanted to know about it. A half dozen strides carried him to the door of the chamber and he looked inside.

The girl was kneeling before his strongbox, with the candlelight soft upon her hair. The rasp of iron on iron came to Noel. He went catlike across the room and stood behind her.

"Don't try to pick the lock, Mary," he whispered. "I've got the key on my chain."

A white and terror stricken face was lifted to his and for a moment the girl was speechless.

"I'm sorry!" he murmured contritely. "But what in the world are you doing?"

"I wanted money ... to bribe a guard! I want to get at James Everard when he is alone and unprotected!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Noel. "Another one on his trail!"

"Then you know about the ... the ..."

"The baron? Yes! And does he know you're here?"

"He does, Mr. Grantland. We've much the same errand!"

"You don't mean you want to kill—"

"No," she smiled. "But I'm going to put my knife at his throat and make him give back the money he stole from my brother by cheating at cards! It was my inheritance, and my brother killed himself. The life that Everard owes me I shall not try to collect."

"Mary, you are going right now, with me, to a place of safety!"

"I have not followed from New York, and worked as a kitchen wench, to give up to-night!"

"Wait!" exclaimed Noel, with an uneasy glance over his shoulder. They ought to get out of that room as soon as possible, he thought, but it would be quicker to humor the girl than to argue with her. He knelt beside her, took out his keys, and threw back the lid of the strongbox.

INSTEAD of the few canvas bags of gold and the many sheaves of red taped papers which Noel had expected to see, he found himself staring at a golden fortune in eagles and double eagles, stacked carefully so that no inch of space in the box was left unfilled. Everard had found the duplicate key which Noel kept in his secretary and had turned the strongbox into a treasure chest.

A feeling that was as distinct as a touch on the shoulder brought Grantland out of his astonishment; brought him to his feet, turning as he sprang up. James Everard faced him across the room, holding a pair of pistols carelessly but with a finger on each trigger. There was no slightest chance for Noel to draw his own.

"Mine enemy," said Everard, in an even voice, "is delivered into my hand!"

The tableau held for a moment. Noel had but one thought—how to save Mary. Everard had not, apparently, as yet realized that she was other than

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the slim and beardless youth she seemed. A little more light on her face and she would be lost.

There was a heavy glass paper-weight on the writing board of the secretary, not a yard from Noel's hand: Everard pocketed one of his pistols and drew out a little silver whistle. He put it to his lips and blew a blast.

In that instant Noel leaped, and swept up the paper-weight. Everard's pistol crashed, and Noel felt a little tug at his coat. The crystal went through the air straight and true, and dented the hardwood door casing where the head of Everard had been a half second before.

Before Everard could draw his second weapon Noel had him down, and helpless in an arm and headlock. Mary flashed past and out of the room. Thank heaven she had understood that this was her chance for freedom! She had no more than gone when a rush of many feet came up the main stairway. Noel set himself to lift his prisoner and get at the loaded pistol that was still in Everard's pocket.

But his fingers had barely touched the weapon when he was smothered down by a great weight of human bodies. His hold upon Everard was broken and fists thudded against his skull. Then in a flurry of kicks and vicious punches he found himself jerked upright, powerless in the grip of half a dozen men. His pistols were ripped out of his pockets and he was held, panting and dizzy, to await the orders of his enemy.

Except for an angry color, James Everard showed no emotion as he got to his feet and set his stock in place. With the merest glance at Grantland he walked to a window and flung it open. Then he turned to the man Blodgett, whose feet and fists had been most brutal of all in the attack on Noel.

"Have the dog pen rolled up under this window, close against the wall," ordered Everard. "Get a rope, about half inch, and bring it here. I'll want you, Blodgett, and two or three others here. On your way to see about the dogs say to Miss Towers that I will be down directly, as soon as I find the hammered silver I came up to get for her. Tell her that the whistle was blown merely because I discovered a thief in my room, who got away. And do you have a search started at once for a boy or very young man who was here with Grantland when I came in. The fellow may be one of his former servants."

BLODGETT left the room without a word. Everard, whistling softly, took a handful of silver bracelets and chains from a leather case and dropped them into his pocket. The guards stood silent but alert. Noel, as he regained his breath, his mental equilibrium, was conscious of a sense of unreality. He tasted blood from a cut lip; the curtains swung a little in the breeze. They were going to give him to the dogs. It could not be true!

Suddenly a furious uproar started at the rear of the house. The dogs gave tongue in an ecstasy of rage. Everard glanced at Noel, and slowly smiled. The bedlam drew nearer until it reached the front of the house and stopped under the open window.

Blodgett came in with a coil of rope over his arm and looked inquiringly at his master.

"Make the rope fast to the strong-box," ordered Everard. "Pass it over the window ledge so that the end will hang about ten or twelve feet above the pen. How's the breeze? Fair?"

"Middling, sir," answered Blodgett.

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"Good! He'll swing back and forth. I'll lay a bet with you, Blodgett, as to whether he drops before the rope wears through on that stone edge. Take either end you like!"

"Ten dollars, sir, if you please, that the rope frays first. He's got arms like steel bars, that gentleman!"

"Done, then, for ten dollars! If you are ready with the rope, put him over!"

Noel heaved, with all the power in his back and thighs, and the two men who at that moment held his arms were lifted from the floor as though they were children. But before he could break away Blodgett caught him from behind with a stranglehold and he had no more breath for fighting. He was forced to the window, lifted into the opening and pushed over the sill with suddenly freed hands. Involuntarily his hands clutched the rope, and he hung spinning just below the stone ledge. Everard reached out and tapped his knuckles with a pistol butt.

"Go lower, Grantland!" he said. "Down to the end of the rope or I'll find ways to make you."

Noel lowered himself hand over hand toward the leaping, snarling dogs, until his feet hung just clear of the best jump that one black monster, evidently the leader of the pack, could make. Lanterns had been hung on the corners of the pen, perhaps so that he could see better the fate that awaited him.

CHAPTER VI.

HANGING ABOVE DEATH.

THE dogs were of no breed that Grantland knew, but in size and strength they were the equals of the Great Dane or the mastiff. They might have been cross bred for strength and savagery. Certainly they seemed more like demons in animal form than dogs as Noel had known them.

He knew now why Black Mike Barnaby, with no lack of ordinary physical courage, had fairly babbled at the threat of this fate. These brutes were mad with desire to tear him to pieces, and it was not until the big leader had exhausted himself that they settled down to a growling, restless vigil.

Everard sat framed in the window above with a lighted cheroot between his fingers. In the occasional glow Noel could see his impassive face, contemplating alternately his victim and the beauties of the night.

Grantland had found a crevice in the stonework where he could brace the toes of his boots. Frequently they slipped and he hung spinning. He shifted his weight from one arm to the other for relief. Until his muscles became cramped and numb he could hang on.

It had occurred to him that he might be able to swing far enough so that he could let go and fall clear of the pen. But invariably he caromed against the wall and whirled in the arc of a circle.

"He's swinging a good deal, Blodgett," came from above. "Do you want another ten? Good! I must go down to Miss Towers now, but I'll come back before he falls. He ought to be good for ten or fifteen minutes more."

The end of the cheroot disappeared. It had really been but a little handful of minutes since Grantland was suspended above the dogs, but to him it was a long stretch of eternity. He wondered what his chances would be of getting killed quickly if he were to

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go up the rope hand over hand and attack the guards.

The moon came up majestically and flooded the countryside with a clear light in which every object stood out with startling distinctness. Grantland, with an aching shoulder pressed against the rough wall of his house, watched it swing clear of the mountain tops. It was time, he thought, for him to climb up to his last battle.

He tried to open one hand for a fresh grip on the rope, but nerves and muscles refused to respond to his will. He could no longer climb! The end, then, was almost at hand. Noel turned his head for a farewell look at his land, and the land of his fathers.

What was that dark mass moving out from the edge of the forest, a few hundred yards away? He drew a quick breath, and trembled like a man with an ague. The blot resolved itself into separate dark patches. Men! They were running. Those two giant figures, forging ahead of all the rest, must be Tom Phelps and Two Finger Pete. Good Tom! Faithful and keen! He had suspected that Noel would get into trouble and he had taken no chances!

The charging men were almost at the hedge that surrounded the grounds before they were discovered. The report of a musket bit the night. Then another gun banged and a wild cry went up from the throat of a stricken guard. The next instant the attacking party went through the hedge with a rending of little branches that was like the crackle of a brush fire.

A WILD yell went up from that devastating avalanche of humanity. Victory and loot! All the worst in that scum of the lake shore was unleashed. They were mad with the lust for battle, for gold, and for what spoil in women they could find among the servants of the house. No futile popping of muskets could stop them now. Only the feel of cold steel or the thundering blow of musket butt could halt one of those charging demons.

On the house of Grantland they descended with the fury of the Assyrian on Babylon. For a few brief moments Noel no longer remembered the excruciating agony that shot from finger tip to shoulder joint. Every fibre of him longed to be in the fight for Grantlands.

Now the battle raged all over the grounds. The main body of the attackers had washed up against the house. There it broke, for a moment recoiling before a blaze of musketry. Then little groups, each with its champion in the lead, dashed, reckless of life, against doors and windows. Glass crashed. Gun butt and ax boomed against stout doors.

The dogs long since had given hideous tongue. Through the grounds men still fought in single combat, denied the main battle by their ferocity. A tongue of flame licked up from an outbuilding, spread to a hayrick, and almost instantly a lurid glare shone over that battlefield as over a fragment of hell.

Sheer misery wrenched the mind of Grantland back to himself. He hung panting above death, partially paralyzed, barely able to keep his grip. The beasts yammered below him. He set his teeth into the rope and bulging neck muscles took over a fraction of the burden.

He saw the knuckles of one hand, blood color in the light of the fire, begin to slide slowly down the rope. Both hands were moving, but he could feel nothing as the palms of his hands

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moved along the rope. Life was measured by inches now. The end of the rope was the end of him.

From below came a voice that somehow rose above the pandemonium of battle, pierced the clamor of the dogs, and filtered to Grantland's numbed brain.

"Noel! Noel! Hold a little longer!"

By one of the mightiest efforts he had ever made he was able to turn his head and look down. For a swift instant the face of the girl Mary looked up at him in the red night. Then with both hands gripping a light iron bar she was prying, striking, thrusting at the wooden bars that fastened the gate of the dog pen. Her hair streamed in the freshening breeze. Some one, guard or pirate, ran at her. She cut him down with a blow of the bar.

Suddenly the gate was open, swinging wide.

The leader of the dog pack shot through to liberty and the snap of his great jaws brushed Mary's legs as she sprang up and pulled herself to the top of the pen. There she clung, balancing herself precariously, while the dogs poured out behind their leader like a dark stream of death.

Around in a long half circle they ran, hunger and slaughter mad, leaping and tearing at every living thing that was in their path.

Noel saw his hands slide down over the end of the rope. He dropped to the floor of the dog pen and lay there like a half empty sack of meal. He was helpless, unable to move or do more than look up into the face of the girl bending over him with a tear-drenched face.

She rubbed his stiffened fingers, pillowed his head in her lap. Her hair swept his face. For just a moment he was content to lie there, with the moon and the night sky and her face above him.

BUT there was work to do. Noel struggled, groaned, and sat up. Even with victory there was an almost superhuman task ahead. For he and Tom Phelps had opened the Pit and liberated a band of fiends who must be subdued, and put to leash, in the hour of their triumph.

Noel rolled over to his hands and knees, fell, rose again and somehow managed to stand up. He reeled, and the arms of Mary dragged at him.

"Stay here!" she begged. "You can't defend yourself, much less fight! They'll kill you!"

He staggered to the gate and saw the iron bar that she had dropped. It fitted neatly to his hand. He lifted his head and it seemed as though he drew power both from within and without himself.

"It's my fight!" he cried.

He slammed the gate and dropped a bar into place. The dogs could not get in and no man would search that unpromising place for plunder. If she stayed there she would be safe until the end of the battle.

The fighting in the grounds had nearly ceased. Here and there an orange flash stabbed the night and brought a death shriek from one of the dogs. The wounded and the malingerers were defending themselves. The hayrick and the outbuilding had burned to fantastic, glowing ruins.

The thunder of sound from the house told Grantland that the battle had reached its climax there. It was hardly to be believed that human throats and human blows could create that cataract of noise. As he ran toward it the uproar rose to a smashing crescendo, and then gradually began to die away.

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Noel went through the ruins of the beautiful fanlight doorway at the front of the house. He sprang over the bodies of a guard and a pirate, locked in a death grip, and stood in the momentarily deserted hall. The chandelier above his head suddenly dripped crystal as a bullet cut a pathway through the pendants.

The big double parlors were the final battleground. A haze of powder smoke hung over the fighting men there, but the firing had almost entirely stopped within the past few seconds. In that deadly struggle there was no time to reload pistol or musket. With knife, fire iron, table leg, even with teeth and nails the survivors fought body to body. The very desperation of this last stand had brought comparative silence. Throats were too parched now for aught but breathing.

Blodgett and Black Mike, covered with dirt and wounds, were the nucleus of the defenders. Shoulder to shoulder they held their ground against the battering remnant of the pirates, still led by the looming demigods, Two Finger Pete and Tom Phelps.

NOEL took a new grip on his bar and searched the maze of shifting heads for Everard. But the man was not there, and suddenly Grantland realized that this was no place to look for the usurper. He would not be found striking a blow in his own quarrel. He would leave the fighting for other men, while he skimmed the cream of their sacrifice.

Well, then! There were other heads to hit! Noel felt the strange exultation of battle surge up within him. With a great cry he launched himself straight toward the center of the Everard men.

"To me, Tom!" he shouted, in a voice that carried above the fight. "Pete! Tom! This way!"

The iron bar became a whirling black destruction. He lunged and cut, thrust and parried, as though he held a rapier in his hand. Grantland fought with a ferocity that carried him beyond all thought of harm to himself. Club and musket fell impotently against that bar of iron.

He wanted to come at Blodgett, to strike the man down with his own hand. He laid a guard flat with a backhand cut, sent another toppling with a thrust between the eyes, and came up to the big leader just as he was swinging a musket butt at the head of Tom Phelps, who was locked in the embrace of three of the enemy. Noel struck, and Blodgett reeled away into the arms of Two Finger Pete.

Noel saw Black Mike go down under the bootheels, and in that same moment Two Finger Pete lifted Blodgett and hurled him against the marble fireplace with force enough to crush even his mighty bones. Then, almost between two breaths, the battle dissolved like mist. With Noel's rush and their leaders down the heart was gone out of the defenders. They went crashing through windows; they jammed in the doorways. And those who could not escape went down like grass before the scythe.

A strange quietness came upon the parlors. Of James Everard's thugs only those were left there who could not drag themselves away. Blodgett lay stretched on the hearth, unconscious. Black Mike was dead, with a rivulet of the gold pieces for which he had sold himself spilling from a torn pocket.

Two Finger Pete and Phelps stared at Noel as they might have stared at one risen from the dead. Tattered, wounded uncounted times, they were

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still ready for more. Tom, with tears ploughing through the grime of his bruised face, was not satisfied until he had poked Noel with a bleeding finger to make sure that he was there in the flesh.

"You fit like a tagger, Mr. Noel!" he exclaimed. "You was like Sailor Hurricane, that I went twenty rounds with—"

"Tom," interrupted Noel, with a twisted grin, "there's still work for us, and we have more than a dozen men on their feet and in pretty good shape. You and Pete take them and clear the house and grounds. Shoot the dogs and herd your prisoners into the dog pen. You'll find a young lady who saved my life hiding in there. Take care of her for me!"

"Aye, sir!" agreed Phelps. "And remember, Mr. Noel, we ain't found Everard yet!"

"I'm remembering!" answered Noel grimly. "I'm going to look for him now!"

CHAPTER VII.

A SURPRISE.

GRANTLAND stopped only to find a pair of pistols and load them. Then, alone by choice, with the iron bar switching in his hand, Noel went slowly up the main stairway. A dead pirate hung head downward over the banister rail on the floor above. One of the defenders had died at the head of the stairs. Noel stepped over him and went cautiously toward his own chamber.

Only one candle still burned in the room. A step at a time Noel entered the room, hardly believing that he would meet with an ambuscade, but risking nothing where James Everard was concerned. Suddenly he halted, rigid. His eyes had become accustomed to the semi-darkness and he found himself looking into the muzzles of two pistols, leveled over the top of the strongbox.

But almost instantly they were flung aside and a head of streaming, tangled, honey colored hair popped into sight where the pistols had been. A slender form unfolded like a jack-in-the-box and sprang toward him.

"Mary!" cried Noel. "I thought I penned you up for safe-keeping—"

"You're hurt! Noel . . . Mr. Grantland! There's blood on your cheek!"

"Hurt? Nonsense! I met somebody's fist, that's all! What do you mean by coming in here—"

"Somebody had to look after all that money! Especially as half of it was gone when I got here—"

Her words were cut short by a weird howling of the dogs. Then a dreadful chorus of snarls and yelps broke forth. A pistol shot cut through that maddening sound and it slowly died away to a rumble of low-toned growls.

"It's nothing," said Noel. "They're killing the dogs. And I've got to go after Everard. He must have been the one who took what he could carry from the strongbox, for he and I alone had keys."

"And I am going with you," said the girl.

"How would it do," asked Grantland, in considerable exasperation, "for you to introduce yourself?"

"Miss Mary van Alstyne, sir!" She curtsied. "Of New York!"

"Miss van Alstyne, you will remain where you are with the pistols which you seem well able to handle!"

He turned and stalked out of the room, only to hear a little patter of feet behind.

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"After what we've been through together!" she pleaded.

"All right!" he laughed. "You'll manage to get into danger anyhow and it might as well be with me!"

They raced through the rooms of the main sleeping floor, for if Everard had left Grantlands then he must be sought by every man capable of sitting a horse. But neither that floor nor the one above it yielded anything but wreckage and a few still forms, either dead or badly wounded.

The attic and the cellars were still to be searched. Grantland found candlesticks and silently he and the girl mounted the attic stairs. With a pistol cocked in one hand he lifted the trapdoor slowly with the other. Out of the attic spoke a voice that he knew well.

"Come up! If you are of the party of Herr von Grantland you have nothing to fear. If you are not, you die!"

NOEL sent the door banging back against the floor and sprang into the attic with Mary at his heels. Then he halted with sagging jaw.

Beside the Baron Johann von Hohenstein stood Diane Towers, pale but unruffled and with the light of a strange elation in her eyes. She regarded Noel with a peculiar smile and at the same time shot a supercilious glance at Mary.

"Permit me," said the baron, with a bow, "first of all to present the young ladies to each other!"

They bowed unsmilingly, with more dignity than friendliness, while Grantland fidgeted.

"Baron von Hohenstein saved my life!" exclaimed Diane, with a shudder.

"*Ach!* That monster!" cried von Hohenstein. "He was holding her a prisoner!"

"Baron," said Noel, with a half suppressed groan, "I'm hunting down Everard! Will you join me or do you feel it necessary to protect Miss Diane Towers?"

"Everard?" Von Hohenstein lifted his hands and eyebrows. "He have already go, as you say in America, to the dogs!"

"What?" cried Noel. "You don't mean—"

"*Ja!* Yes, certainly! I have wait beyond the fighting, and watch for him to run with the plunder! Of course he will do that, this traitor! In the cellar I have catch him, with two saddlebags of gold. I drive him out of the cellar, and into the young bushes where those dogs are! Perhaps you have heard them once more? A few minutes past? Yes? So, Herr von Grantlands, James Everard have end like that!"

WHEN dawn came up over his wrecked mansion Noel Grantland sat, utterly weary and completely happy, at a broad table in the library. Beside him Mary van Alstyne leaned with outflung arms on the polished wood. Little stacks of gold coin were scattered at her elbow. The strongbox was on the floor, open and partly emptied. Two Finger Pete and Tom Phelps sat on the floor of the room with their backs against the wall and muskets across their knees. But their heads had fallen forward and they snored a duet.

An occasional yell came from the parlors, where two doctors from Crocusville had established a temporary hospital. A new sheriff, with Tyson's badge on a flowered green waistcoat, prowled importantly about the house; pausing now and then to sniff at odors of coffee and frying bacon which came in at one of the windows.

"We've paid off the living pirates," said Noel, turning to the hollow eyed

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girl beside him, "share and share alike in the five thousand I promised. The baron has his money again, until Diane takes it over with the title. Now it's your turn, Miss van Alstyne!"

"I don't want the m-m-miserable money!" she exclaimed, in a voice that was close to breaking.

"You're trifling!" cried Noel, in astonishment.

"You trifled with me!"

"I? Never! When?"

"In the k-kitchen! When I first saw you!"

Suddenly Noel had an idea. He sprang up and reached for a slim, pantalooned form that danced away from him with dimples shining through the tears.

"But you aren't going to die now!" she cried.

"I'll die if you don't kiss me!" He caught her and looked down into the depths of brown eyes, glowing with tenderness.

"Oh!" she murmured. "Then I'll have to!"

"Aren't you going to be the mistress of Grantlands?"

"Am I?" she whispered.

THE END.

The Deformed Lips of the Djinge Women

THE so-called Ubangi women, who are one of the main attractions of a large circus, are, as a matter of fact, Sara-Djinges, originally of a tribe located between the Chari River and the Salamat country, south of Lake Tchad. Conspicuous as they are, they are by no means exceptionally wide-lipped, according to the fashion of their people. In fact, in the Djinge country it is not unusual to see women with lips stretched around wooden disks twenty-five inches across.

This barbarous custom, which tends to disappear under the constant influence of the French authorities, originated as a means of protecting the women of the Djinge from seizure by the slavers coming from the Oubanghi country on the south, and the Arab-Tchad territories on the north. The raiders, who disappeared with the advent of the French, were too warlike and well organized for the Djinge warriors, so that the latter thought that the only way to keep their women was to make them so hideous to the invaders that the latter would simply shrink away from them.

As always happens, the protective deformation became in time a mark of accepted comeliness, and a tribal custom. The large disks, of course, represent the finished stage. The lips, pierced in early childhood, are at first stretched by the insertion, torturing to the victim, of small round disks. For these are gradually substituted progressively larger ones. In due time the terrific pressure acts on the individual's gums, causing the falling of the teeth, so that most of the unfortunate crocodile-lipped Djinge women are toothless and bound to an everlasting diet of soft, boiled millet.

Armand Brigaud.

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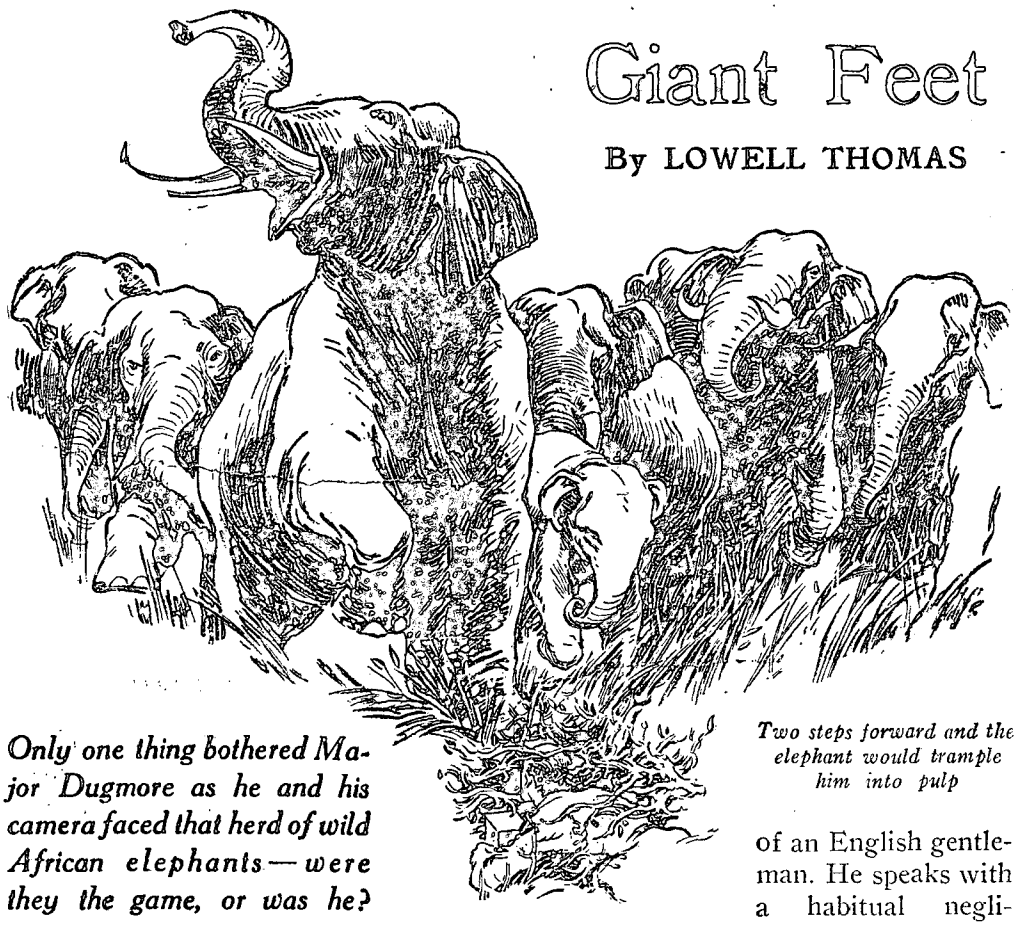
Giant Feet

By LOWELL THOMAS



Two steps forward and the elephant would trample him into pulp

Only one thing bothered Major Dugmore as he and his camera faced that herd of wild African elephants — were they the game, or was he?

THE major is a cool proposition. There is nothing burning about him, and especially nothing tepid. Cool and effervescent are the words to describe him. Major Arthur Radclyffe Dugmore is, in addition, something of a Jack-of-All-Trades. He is a mariner, an explorer, a naturalist, a soldier, a lecturer, an author and a painter with a reputation for his portraits of wild life. He is a man of middle height, with a strongly knit figure, a close-cropped mustache, and a decidedly cool, quizzical, offhanded British manner. He is talented, cultured, and witty.

He would be a wild Irishman, if he didn't have the decorous mannerisms of an English gentleman. He speaks with a habitual negligence, slurring over his exciting experiences as matters of little consequence.

It was while seeking to photograph an elephant herd in the Marsabit country that the major was snarled in a harrowing mix-up.

He had set up a blind at the far end of an elephant playground, a meeting place of the great beasts in a narrow little glade, where a cool sunlit pool shimmered. His camera was focussed on the trail, and he sat in his shelter, waiting for the two-ton playboys.

From time to time he heard the sounds of elephants feeding. Dusk was at hand when the rustling, rending crash of a branch behind him made him jerk his head around so quickly

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he almost snapped it off. Spread out in a long line, roughly abreast, were about twelve elephants coming toward him.

The major had thought the beasts would come in front of his shelter; but instead, here they were behind it. With infinite caution he eased himself flat, trying to push himself into the ground, hoping the elephants wouldn't see him. Because of trees and brush he could not see the animals in their entirety; here a head and tusks showed, there trunks and ponderous legs were to be seen. The forest itself seemed to be alive, moving slowly and ominously toward him.

After some moments of slow advance, the herd stopped; and the major could see them more clearly, as they stood swaying, swinging their trunks and twitching their huge ears. He guessed the elephants had sensed an alien, unknown presence.

An old cow elephant advanced a step or two toward Dugmore. A male calf lumbered hastily after her, waving his trunk. He stood close under her protecting side, while the giant female paused to sniff the air.

She weighed at least five tons. One of her large tusks turned in, instead of outward. Again she came on a few steps, paused and peered and sniffed; then cautiously took a few steps more. The herd slowly followed. There was a swishing of branches along their sides and backs, but their huge feet—giant feet—came down without any sound.

WITH his eyes fixed upon this unavoidable march of death, the major's flesh crawled, and he panted soundlessly. The air was moving ever so gently, back and forth, through the forest, variable, shifting. It seemed to tantalize the female leader of the herd with a confusion of the scent. Tremulous and fearful, she advanced until she stood within eight feet of the quaking major.

The elephant's bulk hid the sky. Her trunk curved upward, and Dugmore stared fascinated at the pink mouth gaping between the tusks. The trunk swayed and groped above him. The elephant's ears, swinging and gently flopping as she listened, stirred a breeze that rustled the top of the shelter.

To the major, the beast no longer appeared to be of this world. She seemed to be huger than any living creature could possibly be. Her skin seemed magnified. He could see its texture. Her trunk was like an enormous, eyeless snake.

She lifted one foot. He stared up at it, at its round flat, wrinkled undersurface. Two steps forward and she would trample over the blind. Two paces more and her enraged bulk would smash him into an unrecognizable pulp.

For an instant the monstrous, unearthly beast seemed to have eight legs. Then his vision cleared. The extra legs belonged to the elephant calf; it lumbered, ponderously playful, beside its mother. The cow stood steady; immovable, inconceivably huge. Her foot was suspended in mid-air. For the major time itself was suspended.

Then slowly she put her foot down. She put it down as softly as a cat treads, without a sound. And she had not moved forward. She had decided that there was no danger. The man lying prostrate at her feet sensed it; he knew it. Her ears flapped back against her round, gray heaving shoulders. She coiled her trunk on her tusks, and turning she moved away among the trees. The rest of the herd turned too, and in a single file lumbered past the blind, disappearing into the gathering shadows.

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For some minutes the major could not move; he was flat, exhausted by the ordeal. Death had stalked upon him slowly, ponderously, interminably; only to turn away at the last moment. A glance at the watch on his wrist showed that fifteen minutes had passed; only fifteen minutes. It had seemed like those first hundred years we so often hear about.

WHILE camera hunting in the Sudan, Dugmore again had a mix-up with a cow elephant that came near doing him in. He had come upon an enormous herd of females known far and wide among sportsmen as The Suffragettes. About sixty yards from a small group of the giant beasts he set up his motion picture camera. Before him was a mother elephant and her baby; and a few yards beyond them nine other elephants were feeding. He had just started to turn the crank when the cow elephant stared right at him. The limb she was rolling in her trunk dropped to the ground. Up went her trunk and wide went her ears. The elephant gathered herself and got her huge bulk under way.

For once Dugmore's courage failed him. He had never killed an elephant; he had sworn he never would. But in the face of the angered brute's charge he changed his mind.

"Quick," he cried to his gun bearer. "The rifle."

He reached his left hand behind him for the weapon and turned the crank with the other. The elephant came on, gathering s p e e d, uttering the most blood-curdling screams. Round and round went the crank; faster and faster came the charging brute.

His left hand groped futilely for the gun. He flashed a look behind him. His Fajoli gun bearer was in full flight, and the rifle was clutched in his hand. At the sight Dugmore went completely to pieces.

For a moment habit kept him turning the crank of his camera. Then terror seized him and he fled across the grassy space with his precious camera clutched in his arms. He knew he could not out-run his giant pursuer, that his only chance of evading her charge was to get out of her sight, behind some kind of shelter. But somehow he could not stop.

The elephant was overtaking him. Her squeals sounded like the voice of doom in his ears; her pounding tread shook the ground. Snatching a glance over his shoulder Dugmore saw that she was almost upon him. His step faltered. He pitched headlong to the earth. With the crash his breath went out of him. The world vanished in merciful oblivion.

When he recovered from his knock-out he was inexpressibly astonished to find that he was still alive. The camera was safe in his arms. He sat up groggily. The elephant's squeals seemed to be retreating. He saw her plunging madly away. Into the herd she went screeching, and they fell in behind her. The Suffragettes went stampeding away in a colliding, squealing mass.

No one will ever know just what frightened the cow elephant out of her purpose. Dugmore thinks that as he tripped, the lens of the camera caught the sun and flashed it back into her eyes, blinding her momentarily and making her swerve. Whatever it was, it saved his life.

ANOTHER TRUE STORY BY LOWELL THOMAS NEXT WEEK

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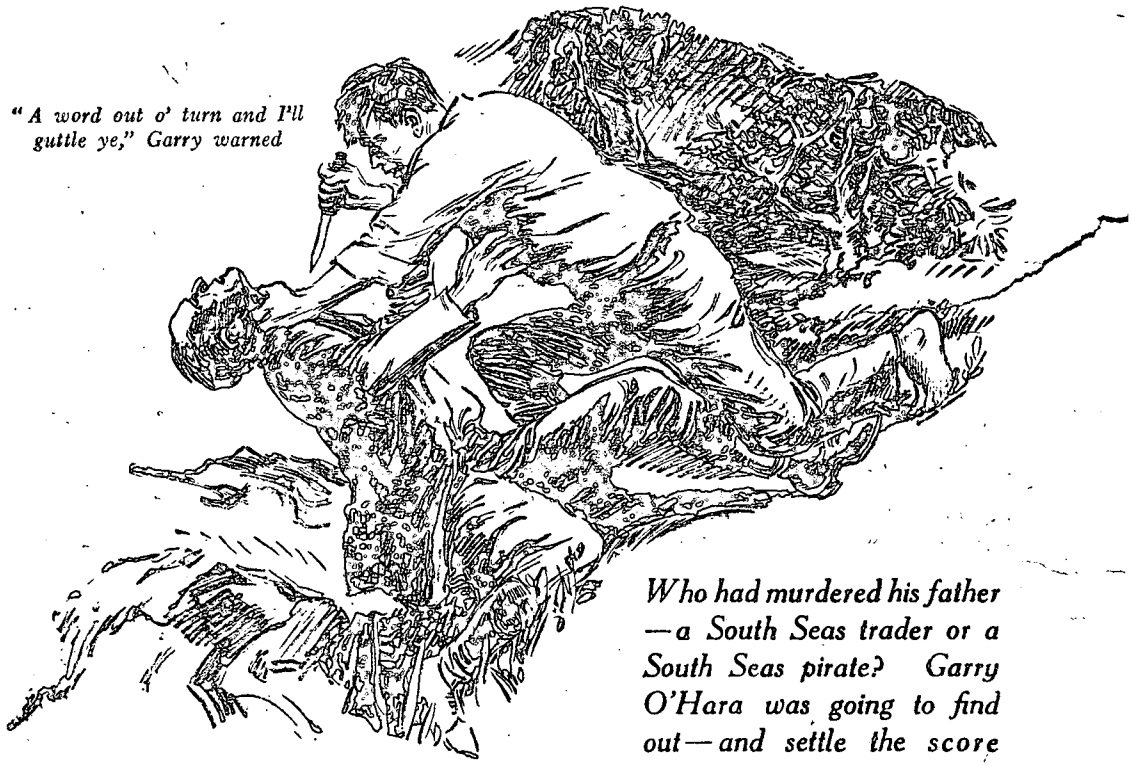
Inheritance

By R. V. GERY



"A word out o' turn and I'll guttle ye," Garry warned

Who had murdered his father—a South Seas trader or a South Seas pirate? Garry O'Hara was going to find out—and settle the score

THIS STORY HAS JUST BEGUN—START IT NOW.

THREE men sat on the veranda of a plantation house on the island of Celebes, in the Dutch East Indies. They played cards as they sipped their drinks, and discussed the subject that perturbed two of them: Harry Pogue, captain of the trading schooner Annabel and Doctor Hector McCandlish.

The third man, Black Tom O'Hara, veteran trader and owner of the plantation, was not perturbed, although he was the one most directly concerned. That morning he had received a warning note from Rodman Lanier, owner of a near-by plantation, ordering O'Hara to leave the island.

O'Hara had snorted contemptuously at the threat and disregarded it. As his guests arose to go, a shot broke the stillness of the night and O'Hara fell over dead.

Rushing out into the yard, the captain and the doctor found a revolver—one that belonged to Lanier.

The two men hurry to notify Garry, Black Tom O'Hara's son, who, because he would rather wander freely and cares nothing about commerce, has been living in a hut of his own.

This story began in last week's Argosy.

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Although he acknowledges their suspicions, he is not convinced that Lanier shot his father. At the time of the killing, Garry was leading Bernice Lanier, who had become lost in the dark, to her home. Her father, she told him, was waiting for her.

This was true—Lanier did not fire the shot—but he had been dickering with Yang-poo, Oriental bandit, to get the elder O'Hara out of the way. When Gonzales, Yang-poo's lieutenant, tells Lanier that O'Hara is dead, Lanier collapses from fear. Yang-poo, who seeks control of both Lanier's and O'Hara's plantations, had seen to it that Lanier's gun had been used in the killing.

The bandit's plans go even further—he desires Bernice as an addition to his harem. He has Li, keeper of the harem, kidnap her and take her to his island fortress.

CHAPTER VII.

ACCUSED.

McCANDLISH swore comprehensively.

"There, by the Lord!" he said. "I told ye so!"

Garry O'Hara and Pogue said nothing for a long time after Bernice had vanished into the darkness after identifying her father's gun. Garry's jaw had dropped with consternation, Pogue was fathoms deep in thought. Only the doctor, flushed with triumph, continued to boast of his shrewdness.

"Now will ye tell me 'twasn't Rodman Lanier, Garry O'Hara?" he demanded. "He wasn't there, says she. Then tell me how his pistol was."

He fairly crowed with satisfaction.

"It's your business, Garry lad!" he cried. "No more shilly-shally! The thing's daylight clear. Lanier's the man. Go up yonder now and pluck the black heart out of him, daughter or no daughter. Though troth," he added gallantly, "she's a sweet one!"

Garry turned to Pogue. "And you, cap'n?" he asked.

Pogue shook his head. "No," said he. "It's not so easy as that, Hector. We still have the same question to answer. What man, desiring to murder another, would fling away a thing like that—a weapon that could be identified all over the Indies—on the very spot where it was fired?"

"And the answer's Lanier still," the doctor insisted. "Lanier would. Lanier did. Think, the pair of ye! What's all this about illness? Fit, eh? I know the sort of fit. He blows Black Tom's brains out, slips home in a hurry—and finds the pistol's left behind. Left behind, to hang him. Little wonder he's in a fit. So he sends the girl down here to-night again . . ."

He stopped, for there was that in Garry's eye that did not encourage further pursuit of this subject.

"Lanier must explain," said Pogue.

"Explain!" McCandlish shouted. "There's no explaining in it! If Garry's what I take him for—"

"Garry's Garry," said that individual. "He'll act as he thinks, doctor."

Pogue had gone to the door and was peering out. "A wild night, gentlemen," he said, "and worse to come. But we'll go up to Lanier now, if you please. The young lady will have warned him by this time, there's no doubt. And that reminds me—none of us is armed, I believe."

Garry took a couple of short pistols from a cupboard, and girt himself with a straight-bladed knife in a leather case.

"Now, forward!" he said. "But before that — it's understood that if

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Lanier's the man, he's left to me. That's a bargain."

The other two nodded together, and they went out into the storm.

IT was raining appallingly now, and in an instant they were soaked to the buff in the blustering sheets of water. The thunder and lightning bellowed and flickered alternately, almost without intermission between successive outbursts, so that they were deafened and blinded, as well as half-choked in swirling gusts.

Pogue set his mouth to Garry's ear. "The path?" he asked.

Garry clutched at him. "Come!" he roared. "We'll take the beach. It's easier."

He led them to the shore of smooth black sand, shining in the glare of the lightning. The three proceeded along it at a steady dog trot, with the sea on one hand lashed milk-white and hammered flat by the wind and rain, and on the other the indistinct mass of the land.

For half a mile they ran, and then even Garry pulled up to a walk, panting.

"How far?" Pogue demanded.

"Just ahead," Garry replied. "Not a couple o' hundred yards." He stopped suddenly, peering under his hand. "Whisht now, what's that?"

The others followed his pointing finger. "I see nothing," Pogue said at last.

"Nor I," McCandlish agreed. "What was it, Garry?"

"Maybe it's nothin' it was," Garry said doubtfully. "But it looked—I thought I saw a little *prau* makin' out from the shore yonder."

"A *prau*—at this time and in this weather? Never. It'd only be one of the Malays, and you don't catch them coming out on a night like this. They're too scared of the thunder. Garry, you're mistaken."

Another flash showed an empty sea. "Well, maybe I am," said Garry without conviction. "But I'd have sworn to it for all that."

They advanced again, cautiously and without a word spoken, until Lanier's house loomed up before them in its trees. There was a light shining in one of the lower windows, and by it they saw Lanier sitting at a table, his head in his hands, in the center of a litter of strewn papers and smashed furniture.

"Guilt!" McCandlish whispered.

"That's to be seen," Pogue said, and hammered on the door.

AT the sound Lanier started and looked about him. Certainly there was little in his demeanor that smacked of innocence. There was fear there, however. Something stood at Rodman Lanier's shoulder and was not to be turned away.

He came to the door and opened it an inch. "Who's there?" he asked, abrupt and discourteous as ever. In the murk and wet the three were unrecognizable.

Pogue told him, and Lanier seemed not a whit impressed. "Well—what is it?" he demanded. "What d'you want with me?"

"Let us in, Lanier," Pogue said. "We've a word with you."

"The doorstep's as good a place as any. You can talk from there."

"Polite, anyhow," McCandlish muttered.

"I think we'd better come in, Lanier," said Pogue.

"Why?" He flung the door wide and stood looking out at them with his hot bull's gaze.

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"For your own sake."

"That be damned! Stop this play-acting and out with it."

"Let us in, then, and I will."

McCandlish interrupted. He had been chafing for minutes. "It's murder, Lanier, damn ye," he said. "You know whose." He shot the words out as if from the muzzle of the pistol in his pocket.

"You'd better let us in," said Pogue quietly. "There's a thing wants clearing up."

Lanier threw his hands up in a fury. "Oh, come in, then—come in!" he cried. "Take a chair—take chairs—take all the house if you want to. O'Hara's here, too, I see. Well, I'm not surprised."

He began to pace the floor jerkily, ranting to himself. Pogue, examining him, came to a conclusion—that Lanier was bound to other lands than the Indies, and that soon. McCandlish was more direct. He spoke with professional interest.

"Ever try cupping, Lanier?" he inquired.

The trader glared. "What's that?" he said.

"Cupping," said the doctor sweetly. "You'll die of apoplexy in a month, my boy, if you go on as you are. Better have me let you a little blood."

Lanier turned crimson and then abruptly gray-white.

"See here," he said weakly, "you didn't come to-night to bait me like this. Get to the point. What d'you want with me? Tom O'Hara's murder, isn't it? Well, I didn't do it."

Pogue swung round to McCandlish. "Show him, Hector," he said.

The doctor dragged out the pistol and slapped it on the table.

"Know that, Lanier?" he inquired with a ferocious grin.

The trader picked the thing up and glanced at it. Then his strong eyebrows went up in surprise.

"Know it?" he repeated. "Of course I know it. It's mine."

HE rose and went to a sideboard, whence he took a case of polished mahogany. Returning, he laid it on the table and threw back the lid. Within, reposing on green plush, lay the pistol's mate; there were empty hollows where this one had been.

Lanier gaped at the blank space a moment, with the eyes of the three men on him. Then he exploded into a fierce oath.

"Damnation!" he roared. "How came you with this, McCandlish?"

To the cautious Pogue, speculatively observing Lanier from behind lowered eyelids, the play acting—if it was play acting—was superlative. But the doctor was beyond such considerations. He leaned back, enjoying his moment to the full. Then he pulled out his own pistol and cocked it suggestively with his thumb.

"Lanier, my fine fellow," he said, "that's the boy that killed Tom O'Hara."

For an instant Lanier merely turned blank eyes from one to the other of them. An expression of bewilderment passed over his face, followed by the heavy flush of rage, which was again swamped in sudden realization. He fell back once more into his chair and passed a shaking hand before him, as if to brush something aside.

"That—that killed Black Tom?" he croaked.

"That."

"I didn't do it."

"We are here to discuss that," said Pogue very quietly.

"I didn't do it," Lanier repeated.

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Garry O'Hara took up the running. Hitherto he had been entirely silent; but now he spoke suddenly.

"Lanier," he said, "listen to me. Some one put a bullet into me father, that'd done him no manner of harm. That man's my meat, Lanier, for as God's above us I'll have his life—I an' no one else. The quarrel's mine, though I'm not interested in the ould plantation nor in Saint's Rest neither—except that ye don't get them. Now, were ye here last night? I've me reasons for askin', an' they've nothin' to do with clearin' your silly self."

"I was here last night."

"All of it?"

"All of it."

"And ye'd no part or parcel in the killin' of me dad?"

"No. No part or parcel. Some one else did it."

"Who, then?"

"I don't know. I'd tell you if I did."

"But you didn't?"

"No!"

"Swear that!"

"I swear it."

"Nothin' in the wide world to do with it?"

Lanier fidgeted. "No," he said, after a moment.

"Never had any idea of killin' me father—nor havin' him killed?"

"No—no!" Lanier's voice was husky and his hands shook.

Garry cocked his head on one side. "Swear that!"

Lanier did not reply.

McCANDLISH leaped to his feet. "And there you are!" he said excitedly once again. "I knew it! I knew it! There's a confession for ye, Garry O'Hara. Now ye've got your man—or one of them. Act, man, act—if it's your quarrel, or by Heaven we'll act for ye!"

He flourished his weapon theatrically in Lanier's face.

Pogue interposed, while Lanier kept his gaze on the floor. "Be still!" he said irritably to the doctor. "Lanier, see here now! O'Hara says he'll have the blood of the man—or men—that did this thing. He means it. So do I. If he weakens, I shall not. Answer me this, Lanier. What part did Yang-poo play in this business?"

Lanier took a long time to raise his eyes. The others waited for him, and at last he lifted his head and looked at them.

"As God's above, gentlemen," he said, unconsciously repeating Garry's own phrase, "I don't know. Not certainly."

"Don't know? Ah, stuff!" came from McCandlish. "Garry—"

"I don't know," said Lanier again doggedly. "I wish I did." He gulped. "I'll confess, if you wish, that th[illegible] were ideas in my head, ideas of killin[illegible] O'Hara. You can't hang me for tha[illegible] I had even hinted—if you must have it—to Yang-poo that it might be worth his while to—to help me. No later than yesterday, that was. Black Tom had put me in a rage. But the killing—and I believe Gonzales did that, though I've no mortal proof—that was as much of a surprise to me as it was to you. And now—this!" He gestured at the pistol. "That was filched from its case here. I never gave it to any one. Is it likely I should?"

Pogue nodded slowly. "No. Very unlikely," he admitted. "I grant you that. And you believe Gonzales fired the shot?"

"He told me this morning that the thing had been done. That's all I know."

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"Then there's the explanation of this pistol of yours, eh?"

"I've no other. Gonzales must have taken it deliberately and planted it there, to ruin me."

"He seems to have been successful enough. Gonzales took it, you think?"

"Who else? Or some one of my people gave it to him."

"Can you suggest who?"

Lanier pondered. His nerve was beginning to come back to him a little under Pogue's tactful handling.

"No," he said. "It might have been any one of half a dozen. My overseer—my butler—any one of the boys. They're always palavering with Yang-poo's lot."

"Would Miss Lanier know?"

"Maybe. But I'd rather keep this," he nodded at the pistol on the table, "from her."

"Useless, Lanier, she knows already."

"What's that?" Lanier's face grew dark again.

Pogue told of Bernice's visit to Garry's house.

"Go get her, Lanier," he said. "This pistol business must be cleared up. And remember, she's your only witness for last night."

LANIER got up and went out. McCandlish looked after him and shrugged as if washing his hands of a hopeless business.

"Is he safe, d'ye think?" Garry asked.

"Why not?" Pogue said. "He's nothing to gain and everything to lose by any foolishness. See what the girl says now. I'm inclined to believe Lanier, as far as he goes."

"And that's not far."

"Nevertheless, it settles one thing. Yang-poo and his rats will have to be routed out of that nest of theirs. A report of this to the Dutch—"

"Ah, the Dutch!" Garry was beginning, when there was the sound of hurried feet, and Lanier burst into the room again.

"Gone!" he babbled. "She's gone! She never returned!"

"What!" Garry and the doctor were on their feet.

"They saw her go out—it's two hours ago!" Lanier stammered. "And she's not in the house now—"

Garry smote his thigh with a curse. "The *prau!*" he said. "Wasn't I tellin' the two of ye?"

And Pogue, rarely for him, called upon the devil.

It was a good minute before any of the four found further speech. Lanier had thrown himself into the chair and was gnawing at his fingers, with haggard eyes.

Doctor McCandlish was swearing softly and inarticulately to himself. Garry stood motionless, his brow wrinkled as if in thought. Pogue had gone to the window and was peering out at the storm.

Finally he turned back into the room. "We can do nothing till daylight," he said heavily. "I'll put the Annabel in then as close as may be, and we'll go in in the whaleboats, with the guns to cover us. But now we would be aground five minutes after we weighed anchor, and I'll not attack without the ship. Meanwhile—"

He spread his hands in an expressive gesture, and Lanier groaned.

Garry seemed to wake up out of his reverie. "Cap'n Pogue," he said, "you're wiser than the rest of us, but here's where ye fall down. There's more ways of gettin' at Yang-poo than by whaleboats."

"What then?"

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"Swim, ye *omadhaun*—and savin' your presence, cap'n! Swim in an' stick that hog like the hog he is. An' bedad, it's to be done at once. There's no waitin' till dawn. I needn't tell ye why, with the girl over there. Now's the time, this minute—"

"And who'll swim that strait?"

"Why d'ye ask? I will."

"Fool! The sharks'll have you in fifty yards."

Garry jerked out his knife and tested its edge on his finger. "Ah, to hell with the sharks!" he said. "'Twon't be the first time I've ripped their bellies for 'em. Cap'n Pogue, come you in at dawn—you, an' the doctor, an' Lanier here. Yes, ye owe him that. But I'm goin' now, and I'll be seein' the lot of ye later, I've no doubt."

He waved his knife hand at them and went out at a run, leaving the three in a stricken silence.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON A ROOFTOP.

GARRY O'HARA stood for an instant at the edge of the sea strait, its troubled expanse of sable and quicksilver at his feet. The storm still roared about him, with every moment a gust of wind heavy enough to rock him from his position; it was a night straight out of the pit.

"Well, Garry O'Hara, me *bouchaleen*," he said to himself. "Here's for it! A queer ould start, for ye to be visitin' the sharks at midnight, and all for a lady that's daughter to a murderin' villain, like as not, and none too polite anyway herself. But bedad, that's what it's to be, so here goes!"

He plunged into the milk-warm water and headed for the island. He had often enough ventured among the sharks thus, both here and down among the southern islands; and he swam with all of an athlete's powerful ease. Nevertheless his toes tingled all the twenty minutes of his crossing, and he had a hand continually ready to draw his knife if one of the black prowlers should appear.

Ahead of him the island loomed low and indefinite, a mere line of mangroves and bushy shrubs, outlined now and then against the flickering horizon. In mid-channel Garry trod water for a moment to get his bearings; he was pointed for a spit of marshy land, one horn of Yang-poo's shallow bay.

The stockade would be watched, of course. The pirate had a big *prau* permanently stationed as a guardship just on the shoreward side of it, so that Pogue in the morning need not hope for any surprise when he should unleash his whaleboats. But Garry to-night hoped to elude the pirates in the darkness.

At any rate, it was worth trying. He set his teeth and ploughed resolutely on towards the shore.

His feet touched, and he crawled on hands and knees into the shelter of wet undergrowth. A while he lay there, panting. Then, pushing aside the drenched stems, he peered out. He could faintly see the stockade, a formidable row of stakes across the inlet's mouth, and Yang-poo's watch-*prau* just inside it, a black blot against the water.

He considered the narrow tongue of land he was on. This would be looked after, too; odd, if it were not. Weather or no weather, to-night of all nights Yang-poo would have his people on the jump.

Yang-poo had indeed taken his precautions. Garry, crawling cautiously, ran up against one of them not three

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minutes after he had left his hiding place. It was a six-foot wall of wattle, and Garry, listening in a lull of the storm, could hear from beyond it the faint murmur of voices.

Instantly he dropped flat and lay thinking. Awkward, he reflected. A matter for a frontal attack, and that for a lone hand was clearly impossible. His head would be rolling on the ground an instant after it had showed above that barrier. Yang-poo's swordsmen were not to be trifled with; they were most of them head hunters, anyhow. Experts.

He crawled off parallel with the fence, stopping now and then to listen.

The fortification curved away, surrounding, it seemed, the pirate hold, and leaving the seashore. Groups of trees began to rise before him, wind tossed and immaterial, ghostly blocks of deeper shadow. Here and there were stretches of the wall that seemed silent, and Garry once or twice meditated making a rush for it. Each time, however, some slight sound dissuaded him. Discovery would mean things to Bernice Lanier, besides a sudden end to himself. He crawled on, in a quandary.

AT length he stumbled on a path, a dim track snaking in and out of the tree clumps and heading generally for the beach. Garry stopped and deliberated, nose in the mud. Where there was a path there was a gate; and where there was a gate there was an entrance, and a possible weakness. Better look into this.

He rose to his hands and knees and proceeded inland; and had not made ten yards before a man fell over him with a curse.

Garry O'Hara had been in some rough and tumbles at one time and another in his career. There had been times, down the islands, up in China, and once far away on the San Francisco water front, when only his eel-like quickness and a certain dexterity with a knife had saved him from taking the short end of a scrimmage. But the struggle that now occupied his attention in the darkness and wet ooze, fought in complete silence, made all those other battles seem like the merest horseplay.

Fortune favored him from the beginning, for the newcomer was knocked stupid with the fall and surprise, so that Garry was enabled to twist round in his tracks and fasten leechlike to his throat before he could recover or cry out. Even as he did so, and bestrode the fellow, Garry was aware that this was no Malay; and as he shifted his grip on the man's gullet it did not need the strangled Spanish oath that escaped it to tell him who it was that had fallen into his hands.

Garry bent over Gonzales, scientifically throttling him into submission. When the Spaniard's thrashing legs had subsided, and his face showed black in the lightning, the Irishman pulled his knife from the sheath and presented it at his throat.

"Now," said he, "a word out o' turn and I'll guttle ye, me lad!"

Gonzales lay still, his protruding eyeballs sufficient evidence of the efficacy of Garry's methods.

"What are ye doin' here?" Garry hissed. "Tell, or I'll slit your ugly throat an' have done with it! An' speak damned low, at that."

The Spaniard glared at him furiously and remained silent, until a suggestive prick with the knife point and a certain set expression glimpsed on Garry's features encouraged him to speech.

"*S-señor—*" he babbled.

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"Come, hurry now!"

"*Señor,* I beseech you—"

"Ach, damn ye!" Garry jerked out the whisper. "Where's the girl? Quick!" He blooded his point again for good measure, so that the Spaniard whimpered. He was courageous enough in any set action, but this throat-slitting business was too much for him.

"*Señor,* I protest by the Virgin—"

Garry took him by the gullet again and shook him until his eyes set in his head.

"The girl! The lady! Miss Lanier—where is she, ye scum?"

Gonzales gasped for breath before he could answer; and when he did speak, there was a note of surprise in the croak.

"Miss Lanier, *s-señor?* But how should I know? At home, it is to be—"

"Ye lie! She's here, and ye know it! Where? Tell or I'll kill ye!"

THE Spaniard's expression swiftly altered at the words. Hate flared once more in his eyes, and he flung his body round in a convulsive twist that wrenched him half clear of Garry's grasp. The Irishman drove the knife at him, felt its blade meet yielding flesh; but he was taken off his balance and capsized into wet mud. There was a renewal of the curses, the splashing of feet, and Gonzales had vanished.

Garry sprang up, regardless of consequences, and gave chase. Blind with fury, he blundered headlong into the osier wall. It gave before him—thereby disclosing that, like much more of Yang-poo's establishment, it was a good deal of a bluff; and he tumbled bodily over it and onto the ground within.

There was a sentry within a yard of him, but his howl of alarm never reached the night air. A groan, drowned in a peal of thunder, signalized the fierce thrust of Garry's knife into his heart, and a quick heave, shoulder high, dumped the body on the outward side of the fence. It was possible, Garry's racing mind decided, that the man might not be missed for a while. Panting and red-eyed he looked about him, crouched in the wall's black shadow.

Ahead, straight before him, were huddled buildings — Yang-poo's main house. They were in darkness, but as Garry strained his eyes at them, a door opened and shut rapidly, releasing a flood of yellow light across the driving threads of the rain. The glimpse was sufficient. There, at any rate, was something to avoid.

Gonzales, no doubt, would be somewhere within by now, rousting out a search party for him. Very soon, matters about that parapet would be far too lively for any comfort. And at that moment, in confirmation, Yang-poo's alarm gong began to thunder with long and furious rolls.

Garry stood erect and plunged forward, straight at Yang-poo's house.

As he did so he heard a yell behind him, as if some man on the wall had sighted his flying figure. He made the shelter of the buildings, dodged into a corner and, knife in hand, waited for what might happen next.

Gonzales, with a very sore neck, and still spitting a choice assortment of Spanish, was in fact leading a posse of Yang-poo's ragtag and bobtail out into the night. They passed within yards of Garry, flattened against the wall—so close that he could hear Gonzales's hard breathing and catch the oiled reek of his followers' naked bodies. A moment, and they had vanished into the

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streaming dark; and Garry knew that for a few minutes at least he had a respite.

He glanced about him again. The thunder and lightning were passing out to sea now, but a last flash showed him that the side of the house was smooth, with neither door nor window visible. Yet he must enter, and quickly. It was death to be caught there in the open, and a possibility at least of survival inside. Besides, behind that wall somewhere was the girl, and Garry found himself in a hot flush at the thought. He hesitated a moment, looking left and right.

Then he grinned, as something showed faintly against the clearing sky. Yang-poo's ineradicable habit of bluffing was once more coming in handy. His house walls indeed were of excellent split lumber, strong and normally impenetrable; but his roof under the nipa thatch was of untrimmed branches, chosen for their curves like so many ship's knees. One of them drooped untidily, so that a jump would put it in a tall man's reach; and as the gong's hubbub broke out again Garry sprang at it, hung for an instant from the end, then hoisted himself bodily onto the roof.

Once there, out of the flaring torchlight, he drew breath. The problem simplified itself. There would be a way out of this, once it was light enough for Pogue and his whaleboats to hammer their way in under cover of the Annabel and the thirty-two pounders. It was a matter of getting to the girl now.

GARRY crouched on the rooftree, while Yang-poo's compound beneath him seethed with excitement. There seemed to be scores of the pirate's adherents loose there, each with a separate idea of action, while the gong kept up its booming diapason and the torches hissed and sputtered in the rain.

Garry's grin became a chuckle, and he began to hack at the nipa thatch with his knife. In five minutes he had slashed through the wet stuff and wriggled his body through the aperture until he hung by his hands, his feet swinging in the dark. Then he let himself drop, with a muttered reference of his affairs to the saints. He came down with a soft thud on a heap of mysterious bundles.

Once again Garry chuckled as he gropingly explored his surroundings. This was Yang-poo's storehouse, or one of them. The pirate kept his loot in this triangular loft of his house. Garry could feel all manner of articles here, sacked up in matting, identifiable enough, some of them, by the mere feel.

There were vessels of all shapes and sizes, thrown pell-mell into bags; Garry imagined by their chasing that they were of precious metal. One leather affair contained what was coin by its jingle as he cautiously shook it. There were arms by the dozen and fittings by the score; Heaven knew what ships had gone to the plenishing of this hoard.

At first, after the glare and tumult without, Garry found the place dark as Erebus and very silent; but little by little his senses grew familiarized with his surroundings, and he observed one or two things.

Light was streaming faintly but steadily through cracks in the rough floor.

There were a dozen such places; and below him the house was full of movement. Shufflings of feet came up to him, and the indefinable sound of voices.

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A faint clink and rattle somewhere was suggestive of jewelry, and there was an occasional clatter of cooking pots; a woman's shrill laugh sounded hard by. And a reek of perfume, victorious even over the miscellaneous aromas that rose from the bundles, told him beyond any doubt where he was. For a wager, the female quarters were right under his feet.

Again, and with renewed precautions, Garry began to crawl. He was moving towards the largest chink in the flooring, so that with an eye glued to it he might lie and see what was going on below. Navigation in that darkness was a matter of difficulty, complicated by the imperious necessity of making no sound; but foot by foot he wormed his way across the bales, and at last, wedged close among them, he dropped his head low to the boards and peered between them.

He was looking into a room, brightly lit with hanging lamps. It was a tiny place, but one blaze of garish color, decorated, walls and floor, with shell and mother-of-pearl. There was a little table in it, just such a piece of Chinese lacquer as Garry remembered Black Tom using at Saint's Rest; and on the table stood a silver flagon of wine and a cup of crystal. Down one side of the room, and immediately under Garry, ran a great wide couch of carved wood, piled with cushions; and on the cushions, so that he could look straight down on the top of her head, sat a girl.

The girl was Bernice Lanier, and she was staring in front of her, motionless, with her chin in her cupped hands. Garry caught his breath at sight of her, but she neither moved, nor, seemingly, heard him.

As he watched her, the door of the room opened, and Yang-poo himself entered, resplendent in his Canton silks.

CHAPTER IX.

THROUGH THE CRACK.

IF Yang-poo forecasted finding any shrinking violet in that secluded chamber of his he was speedily disillusioned.

Bernice sat motionless, only her dark intense gaze shifted contemptuously to the pirate. There was no whit of fear visible in it, nor any complaisance. Rodman Lanier's daughter stared the tall Oriental through and through as he stood bowing in the doorway. Then she spoke one clear syllable: "Well?"

Yang-poo straightened himself, and a flicker of something akin to surprise showed in his face. He moved slowly, however, and with some dignity, to a brocaded chair that had probably once graced the withdrawing room of a governor's lady, and sat down on it, hands on his silken knees. Smiling a little, he inclined his head at Bernice, and fluttered the fan he still carried in these domestic circles.

"I have come," he began in his clipped, singsong English, "to ask your pardon, Miss Lanier."

Bernice, Garrett observed from above, was not unduly affected by this opening.

"Pardon?" she repeated steadily. "And—for what?"

This was awkward to answer, Yang-poo discovered. There was a directness about it. He let his expressionless brown eyes rove over the girl while he considered how to meet so spiny a question. Bernice's glance never wavered from him for the many seconds during which she sat thus.

Finally he said, "You were brought

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here, Miss Lanier, under strange conditions. You need have no fear—"

"Fear?" The word sounded to Garry much like a tiny snort. "I am not afraid, Yang-poo."

The pirate snapped his fan shut, a gesture of irritation with him.

"You are not?"

Bernice laughed in his face, again a new experience for him.

"No," she said levelly. "Not of anything you are likely to be able to do. It is you who should be afraid, Yang-poo."

Yang-poo frowned. "I have not met many things to make me so," he informed her. "Of what do you speak?"

"They will hang you for this. That is the end of pirates."

"Possibly. All things are possible. But I think not; my end is otherwise. And meanwhile," he leaned forward, his silks rustling, "I have an offer to make to you."

"An offer?"

Garry, above, came near giggling at the cool scorn in the voice.

"If you will listen—"

"I am listening, Yang-poo."

THE Chinese relapsed into thought for a moment. Garry O'Hara could hear the thumping of his own heart.

"Lady," Yang-poo began, dropping the formal title for the flowery one, and speaking in low unimpassioned tones, "they call me pirate. That is a name and nothing more. It may be that certain of my doings," he blinked, "have not been understood by foreigners in these seas. I do not know. That is their view of me. I am a great deal more than a pirate, however. I am an ambitious man."

He paused as if to let this sink in, and continued. "Remember," he said, "I am no ordinary Chinese. I have been in your West—London, Paris, America as well. There I learned much, unlearned more. Do you fancy that this," he swung a long hand about him, "satisfies me? That this is what I, a man of the world, want? I am not a coolie, nor a Sulu robber. I have vision."

Bernice Lanier said, "Continue," in a totally unreadable voice.

Yang-poo bowed again. "Vision," he repeated. "I see ahead. I see myself," he spoke with a kind of hushed reverence, "something more than the little chief of this island and these broken men. There is power, lady. Power—a ruler, a prince; sultan, maybe, like these others about the Indies. An equal, speaking as equals with their Dutch governors, administrators—received by them with honor, the friend of kings. Nothing is impossible."

Garry grinned. Yang-poo was letting himself go with a vengeance.

"Is that a dream, lady?" the pirate went on. "Mere words? I think not. Listen. O'Hara is dead—"

"Who killed him?"

"Does it matter? Gonzales, if you must know. He is dead, and his house comes to me, I tell you. The Dutch? They will confirm me there. I shall be a good ally to them. O'Hara's boy? He will not take his inheritance. An idle wanderer. And if he is anything else—why, so!"

He whipped a hand suggestively across his throat, while Garry, five feet above him, ground his teeth.

Yang-poo pursued his subject. "That house, then, this island for the strength of it, and—"

"So it was Gonzales that killed Black Tom," Bernice interrupted. "Then what of my father, Yang-poo. And of me?"

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The pirate replied at once as if this was a part he had already rehearsed.

"To yourself, lady," he said, "I offer a task—the task of helping me to all these things. With you at my side—I am suggesting, of course, marriage, according to whatever rites you choose—there is nothing that will stop us."

Grandiloquently he brought it out, and waited for the girl's reply. Instead she asked another question.

"And my father?"

Yang-poo shrugged. "A difficulty," he admitted. "There is, for him, the suspicion of murder. You know it? Also, if signs do not fail, I think he will die very soon. He is diseased, sick. But—unless you are wise, lady—they will hang him before that. The Dutch. That pistol of his—"

Bernice had risen suddenly. "What of the pistol?" she said. "Who put it there, Yang-poo?"

Yang-poo spread his hands in a gesture of complacency. "A question!" he said. "Hardly worthy of your intelligence, Miss Lanier. But what does it matter who put it there? The Dutch will believe Rodman Lanier flung it away in panic. And—they will not wait to think. I know them. Now, will you be wise? Rodman Lanier is a dead man but for you."

Bernice Lanier began, "But—" Then she stopped, for the door flew open and Gonzales entered.

HE addressed Yang-poo without ceremony. "Come," he said. "This is serious."

Yang-poo turned on him. "Leave me!" he said. "I am occupied."

The Spaniard bowed, a trifle ironically. "You are fortunate," he murmured. "But occupied or not, you must come. Young O'Hara is on the island."

"Young O'Hara? Well, what of it? Kill him."

"He cannot be found," Gonzales confessed. "We have combed the place."

"Why do you say he is here?"

Gonzales felt his throat, and displayed a gash in his right arm. "These," he said succinctly. "Evidence enough. I met him—or he me."

Yang-poo looked at him, stroking his chin. "It is your business, Gonzales. Find him. I am busy."

"The ship—"

"Well, what of the ship? Anchored in the channel. Pogue will not attack. We agreed that."

"They are running out the guns. Our scout returned. They are coming, Yang-poo, I tell you."

"Let them come, then. Send the men to the swivels, close the stockade gap, load the muskets—you can do it as well as I." Yang-poo spoke impatiently, oblivious of the breathless interest with which Gonzales's words had been received by Garry overhead. Pogue was moving. It must be long after midnight now. Two hours would see the beginning of dawn. Two hours. An eternity, for all that.

Gonzales would take no refusal. "No," he said obstinately. "You must come, if only for a while. This lady," a sidewise glance shot at Bernice, "will wait. The men need you."

Yang-poo said something to himself in Chinese, probably uncomplimentary; but he turned to Bernice.

"I must leave you," he said briefly. "You will consider what I have offered? If there is anything you need, clap your hands. In a little while I return, and we can complete this business."

He shuffled out after Gonzales, and Bernice dropped back into her chair.

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The monstrous strain of the last minutes had told heavily on her, and Garry saw her shoulders shaking with the reaction. He set his lips to the crack, and very softly whistled a bar of the "Irish Washerwoman."

Bernice started and raised her head. Garry whispered, "Look up, *asthore!*" He thrust a couple of fingers through the crack and waggled them in her astonished face.

"Whisht, now!" he enjoined. "Steady, me dear—no screeching! It's me—Garry O'Hara!"

The girl choked back her cry. Then, in the same hushed undertone, and with a renewed flash of her old mordant humor, "Ah, Mr. Garrett—still the perfect knight, to the rescue of distressed damsels?"

"'Deed, an' I don't know so much, this minute," Garry said. "I'm in a small trifle of a fix meself. I'm in here—and a sweet divil of an ould place it is—and it's unknown to me how I'll get out!"

"What made you come?"

"'Twas the only way. Pogue's attackin' with the daylight. But till then ye couldn't well be left here alone."

"Very considerate of you, Mr. Garrett. And now you are here, what do you propose? Yang-poo will be back in a while, and I have a word for him that will hardly please him, I believe. Perhaps you have a suggestion for a poor defenceless girl in the grip of such a person, Mr. Garrett."

There was a tinge of delicate malice that made Garry wince. Moreover, there was point in her question. Her situation, and his own, were dangerous, not to slur over matters. Garry scratched his head in the dark.

"Can ye keep him at arm's length, d'ye think, for maybe the inside of a couple of hours? We'll have Harry Pogue's guns blowin' this ould place about our ears by then."

"A couple of hours! Mr. Garrett, if it were not indelicate, I'd point out to you that much may happen to a lady in a couple of hours. And as for my ears, sir, I would prefer to have the place keep from about them."

GARRY laughed silently. This was a tight corner faced as it should be; flippantly, lightly, after his own heart. The girl was a thoroughbred, whatever her father might be. Then he fell very serious once more.

"It's difficult," he said. "Thunderin' difficult. But there's one thing—ye'll not be down there alone to face ould Tee-to-tum. Wait now while I do a bit o' rummagin' up here. I'm comin' down to ye."

"No!" There was that in Bernice's negative and the hasty gesture that accompanied it that told Garry of the tingling nerves gallantly masked. "No! Stay where you are!"

"And why, faith?"

"They'll kill you if they catch you."

"Indeed, an' they might at that. But there'd be proceedin's first, let me tell ye. Garry O'Hara's not the one to sit quiet an' leave ould Tee-to-tum or any of his boys take liberties with his throat. No, bedad! But I can't leave ye down there."

"Why not? I shall find a way to take care of myself."

"Hum! Independent of ye, Bernice. But how'll ye do it?"

"I shall find a way."

"Arrah, will ye stop blandanderin' an' have sense? Listen, now—d'ye think ye've nerve enough to stick ould Yang-poo when he comes back?"

"Nerve? I don't know. Try me, Garry. You heard what he said about—about my father, and what he hinted

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for me? I think my nerve would have to be strong enough. But all I have here is a shell comb—"

Garry gave a grim little chuckle. "We'll do better than that for ye," he asserted. "Here, slip this fellow in the loose of your dress. And if Yang-poo gives ye any of his nonsense before I can find a way out o' this, stick it in the ribs of him."

He drew his knife from the sheath and dropped it point first through the crack in the boarding, so that it fell on the cushions at Bernice's side.

"It's no pretty weapon for a lady," he said in half-humorous apology. "But it'll cook ould Cockalorum's goose for him."

She picked it up hastily. "Oh—but why?" she faltered, the flippancy all gone from her. "You shouldn't have, Garry. What—what about you?"

"Ah, that!" Garry spoke with a stoutness he was very far from feeling. "Haven't I me two hands? They've pulled me out o' worse than this many a time."

For a moment Bernice was silent. When she spoke it was in a hushed small voice Garry had not heard from her before.

"Thank you, Garry," she said. "That—that was brave of you."

THERE was little noise now. The gong was quiet, the patter of hurrying feet had died away. Yang-poo's men were at their posts, Garry conceived, ready for Pogue when he should stand inshore with the dawn. The rain had stopped as well; its beating on the roof had stilled, and there was only the drip from the eaves, maddening to frayed nerves.

Garry O'Hara looked down at Bernice once more, and a queer constriction took him by the throat. A valiant lady, this. Of a type unfamiliar to him in his wanderings; a thousand pities for her to be the daughter of Rodman Lanier, that unattractive would-be killer. An enemy, moreover, declared. Part of that heritage of his.

All liabilities, Garry reflected, and no assets, this thing Black Tom was bequeathing his son. Saint's Rest, that white elephant of a plantation. The score with Lanier, yet to be settled. And this girl here, with the man's courage and the gallant humor—it might be different, he thought, if he was like the rest of them, a quiet, methodical, over-the-counter trader. A huckster—the old line of thought recurred, but this time there was something of a tinge of regret in it.

He spoke. "Ye heard what that divil said of me dad and his killin'? 'Twas Gonzales, after all, did it; and indeed it had been me own thought from the start."

"My father—" Bernice began.

"He's a queer ould boy, your dad," Garry said. "A good hater. Me own ould fella—rest him in Heaven this minute—was the like, so they're a pair. Rodman Lanier'd have downed him, or he'd have downed Rodman Lanier, and there's the way they had of it, the two of them. A queer strange business, this killin', Bernice, an' your dad's not clear of it; but I think Black Tom'd have understood. I understand, anyway—or some of it—and I'd be glad for ye to know it."

Bernice did not answer; Garry fancied she was crying. He reverted to more practical matters.

"See here, now," he said. "Here's Yang-poo goin' round all blown up with the conceit of him. He thinks, bad cess to him, he's goin' to walk into Saint's Rest an' the divil knows what else, all because he's thrown a trifle of

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suspicion on Rodman Lanier, and because Garry O'Hara's a—what was it, now?—idle wanderer, eh?

"Well, let him think. But just you keep this in mind—it's known now who did the shootin', an' that's Gonzales. I don't believe your dad had anything, anything at all, to do with that bit o' work. It's comin' clear now. 'Twas a dirty, crooked plot, the same as a Chinaman would think up. Rodman Lanier's safe from me, an' from Pogue an' the doctor as well, after what I've heard now. And as for them two black hearted spalpeens, leave them to Garry O'Hara, that's all!"

BERNICE looked up at him all of a sudden. "Garry," she said, "will you tell me something?"

"Anything ye like."

"Why is it you won't take—your responsibilities?"

"What d'ye mean?"

She made a puzzled little gesture. "Oh—everything," she said. "Saint's Rest, for instance—it's yours now; and you despise it and its trade. What is there wrong in trade, Garry? Or a steady life, like others? Must you always be a roamer? Always a wanderer—idle, as Yang-poo said?"

Garry shifted uncomfortably. No one had taken quite this line with him before.

"Ah, ye don't know what ye're sayin'," he muttered. "Isn't me life me own—"

"No!" Bernice interrupted so decisively that Garry started where he lay. "There are other things."

"Such as?"

"You'll not listen if I tell you."

"Maybe. But try, Bernice."

"Not now—later, maybe. If we get out of this."

There was a note in Bernice Lanier's voice far different from her old bright recklessness, as if her present whereabouts had on a sudden become terrifyingly clear to her—it and its possibilities. Garry, looking down at her, saw her head drop, and knew that this time beyond a doubt she was weeping. He cursed under his breath at the sight.

"See here," he said roughly, "enough o' that! That never got ye anywhere, Bernice. Stop snivelin' an' let's think of a way out o' this mess. Yang-poo'll be back soon enough. Divil take it that there's no way I'd be able to get down to ye!"

Bernice shook her head, her face still in her hands, so that Garry tore his hair with impatience.

"Ah, will ye drop that pipin' the eye just a minute, an' help? It's not like ye, this. Faith, I'll do anything ye tell me afterwards, if ye'll behave now."

Bernice spoke in a small voice. "Will you take Saint's Rest—Garry?" she asked.

There was a long silence, filled with the mysterious whispers and rustlings of the house.

Then, "Was that what ye meant by 'other things'?" Garry demanded in the tone of one being led irresistibly but reluctantly towards an unknown destination. "Come now, let's hear what it is ye've got on your mind for Garry."

But Bernice shook her head again and said nothing. Garry O'Hara scowled in helpless vexation and was about to burst out once more, when from somewhere close came the faint shuffle of slippers and the stiff creak of silks. He flattened himself to the boards, his eye at the crack. Bernice thrust the knife deep into the bosom of her dress and composed herself in her old position upon the couch as the door swung open again and Yang-poo re-

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turned to finish his interrupted conversation.

CHAPTER X.

A RASH MOVE.

RODMAN LANIER and McCandlish were in the great after cabin of the Annabel. It was about the turn of the night, or a little later, and Captain Pogue was out on deck somewhere, setting matters in order for the attack which, he insisted, must wait until daylight.

The two men were fretting with impatience, and showing it in their respective manners. Lanier, upon whom the doctor had performed a bleeding, was slightly paler than usual, but the swollen veins in forehead and neck had subsided; he sat in a chair, at his old trick of chewing his fingers and glaring savagely before him.

The doctor was at the table, upon which he had laid out a selection of arms for the work ahead. He was going over them, much as if they had been a tray of surgical instruments, humming to himself, and now and again casting a glance full of irony at Lanier in the chair. There was his inevitable flask of spirits on the table as well, and he was sipping and humming, humming and sipping, while he cleaned and oiled one of those new toys—a clumsy revolver—turning it about in his deft physician's fingers. There was one thing to be said about McCandlish and his liquor. It never showed itself, other than in his face and his slum-mocking tongue. His hand stayed steady as a rock; his brain, too.

Now, he was rosily merry, his fine aquiline Highland features rubicund, his eyes sparkling with drink and excitement. He was rapt out of himself at the prospect of a scuffle, and the cautious Pogue already discovered him as a handful to hold.

He squinted at the lamp through the revolver barrel, and grunted.

"Ha!" he said enthusiastically. "A wonderful age, this! Look at this fellow, now—six shots, no less, at the one charging. Six of friend Yang-poo's scoundrels on their road to everlastin' blazes! Man, it's a comfortin' thocht!" He began to load, weighing the bullets in his hand and smiling at them. "One o' these boys, now, who knows, might put a stopper on the gentleman himself."

"No!"

Lanier had shifted in his chair, and was regarding him with the dull fury of an angry bull.

McCandlish cocked an eye at him. "An' say ye so?" he asked. "What's to prevent it, I'd be glad to hear?"

The trader got up and began to pace restlessly up and down. "I am," he said. "Yang-poo's mine!"

"Oho!" said the doctor. "That's to be the way of it, eh? Yours, is he? Troth, there's plenty demand for this Yang-poo. Well, well, I don't know that I blame ye. He's put ye in a pretty pickle, that pirate, for ye're suspeckit of murder this instant, Mr. Rodman Lanier, and I'd ask ye not to forget it. Though indeed and I'm nae sae sure as I was about ye there. It's my belief ye've been fooled—"

"Bernice—" The word ripped out of Lanier as a groan, and his expression was painful to see. The doctor glanced at him sharply once more, and then took him by the shoulders and thrust him back into the chair.

"Be still, man!" he ordered. "Or there'll be no Yang-poo for ye this morning one way or the other. Rest, man, rest, until it's time to go!"

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"Time to go!" Lanier snarled. "It was that hours past. If this captain was anything but a coward, he'd have run in straight after O'Hara."

"I'd be careful how ye called Harry Pogue coward, Lanier. That's one thing he's not. But I don't know that I'm not with ye otherwise. We should have been in there long ago, shoals or no shoals. Single handed, Garry O'Hara'll be in a tight fix by this, I'll wager. Pogue's a wee thing over careful, now and again."

Lanier jumped up irresistibly. "O'Hara!" he said. "Who cares for O'Hara? It's not him I'm thinking of."

"No," the doctor agreed, grave of a sudden. "I'd not forgotten, Lanier, either. But what's to do? It's Pogue that's to give orders here, and daylight's his judgment: He's his ship to consider, after all."

"Damnation!" Lanier spat out a fierce oath. "I can't wait here and see Bernice—God knows what, McCandlish—just because a shipmaster's afraid of his paint. I can't—"

POGUE entered on the last words. He was serious as ever, but there was a purposeful set about the thin mouth. He carried a paper in his hand; a memory plan of Yang-poo's establishment, scrawled out an hour before by Lanier himself.

"A moment," he said. "There is something here you can clear up, Lanier." He put the sketch on the table and turned over his shoulder to the trader. "Look at this," he said.

Lanier stopped his restless pacing to and fro. "In God's name, captain!" he burst out. "When do you move?"

Pogue glanced at the clock. "After one now," he mused. "There'll be light about three. Say three—at the earliest."

"Three!" Lanier swallowed convulsively. "Now, man! Start now!"

"Impossible!"

"Stuff! You could move if you wanted to!"

"Gently, there—gently!" came from the doctor.

Pogue shook his head again.

"No," he said. "I am not an easy man to frighten, perhaps, but this is too much. Aground on a mudbank in there, within grasp of Yang-poo, is a situation that appeals to me very little, I can tell you."

"The whaleboats, then?"

"There again, impossible, Lanier. Yang-poo is waiting for us. Not a doubt of it. Two boats, unsupported, would be helpless against a hundred men behind fortifications. No, it must be with the daylight, when I can cover them with the guns."

"Then we must wait?"

"There is no one regrets it more than I, Lanier. But we must wait."

Lanier had been standing, hands clenched at his sides, their knuckles white with the power of his grip. At Pogue's words he choked, turned a ghastly shade of maroon, stammered some incomprehensible words, and flung out of the cabin.

The doctor looked after him and shrugged. "And there's somebody," he commented, "that 'll go so quick one of these times he won't know he's gone. Harry, ye should have humored him."

"Perhaps," said Pogue. "He's a sick man."

"Ye may say so indeed. But see here, Harry Pogue, this waiting's sore work, even to a placid body like myself. When I think o' that lassie in there, an' Garry O'Hara—"

"And do you believe I'm not thinking as well, Hector? But I tell you

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again, it's rank suicide to think of moving now."

"Weel, we must e'en be patient, then," said the doctor. "An' that reminds me I've a patient myself needs more watchin' than he's gettin'. 'Twould be a good thing now if I kept an eye on this Lanier tod. He's liable to be up to any tricks as he is."

He capped the revolver with care and thrust it into a belt he had strapped about his waist.

"I'll go seek him," he said. "We'll meet here at three."

DOCTOR McCANDLISH went on deck and looked about him. It was now very dark, but the rain had ceased, and the damp wind was driving the clouds, so that a faint star appeared for a moment here and there. The Annabel swung to her anchor in eight fathom of water; but even over the song of the wind McCandlish could hear the mutter of breaking seas on the banks and shallows that lay between her and the island. Listening, he nodded to himself acceptance of Pogue's caution.

Lanier was nowhere to be seen at first. Pogue's men, tough sea dogs all of them, were grouped about the black thirty-two's, now run out for action. A screened glow amidships showed where the smith's forge was lit, for Pogue had a mind to give Yang-poo a taste of old-fashioned red-hot shot. Under the bulwarks, with slung cutlasses, crouched the complements of the two whaleboats, already detailed by Pogue himself. The boats still hung at the davits, but outboard; Pogue was taking no chances on having them in the water before he was ready.

His mate, a dark New Englander, met the doctor, and the latter inquired for Lanier.

"Went aft a while back." The mate spoke a trifle sulkily; he was to remain in charge of the ship and resented it. Pogue was going in himself.

McCandlish thanked him, and went up on to the poop. A dim figure, leaning on the taffrail, remained motionless as he approached; Lanier was staring out at the loom of the island. McCandlish found himself wondering what vultures of remorse might be tearing him at that minute.

The doctor touched his shoulder, and Lanier jumped like a man unexpectedly roused from sleep.

McCandlish chuckled reassuringly. "Come, come!" he said. "Where's the need to fly off so? Ye'll work yourself into another attack. Here, let's look at that pulse again. H'm, I thought so. Quiet, man—quiet! Ye'll have plenty of excitement in a while, though it's a fact I'd forbid ye goin' at all if I did me duty!"

Lanier said nothing to this, only swung back to the rail and resumed his watch of the island. The doctor noted that he was trembling violently again.

"Gently!" he said, soothing him much as one might a fidgety horse. "Take a pull on yourself, man! This will never do!"

Lanier whirled round on him, and even in that light McCandlish recoiled from the expression on his distorted face. He made as if to speak, thought better of it, and thrust the doctor from him with a strong and sudden push; then he leapt on the rail, swung his legs over it, and vanished.

McCandlish stood for an instant dumfounded in astonishment, staring at the place where Lanier had been. He rushed to the rail, puzzled, for there had been no splash as the trader went overside.

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The explanation awaited him. Swinging at a painter was Pogue's dinghy—the three of them had come off in it from Lanier's plantation that evening—and Lanier was in her bows, fumbling clumsily with the hitch.

McCandlish looked down at him. Rodman Lanier's mood had not let him wait for Pogue to weigh anchor and start working the Annabel in. He was anticipating matters; off on a lone hand himself. A violent, headstrong action, McCandlish realized.

With something between a laugh and a curse the doctor heaved himself up, straddled the taffrail in his turn, and dropped floundering into the dinghy's bottom as Lanier freed her. The current snatched at them, and in a moment they were clear of the ship.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

Sixteenth Century Submarine Pirates

PIRATES—those swaggering scoundrels who terrorized merchant ships from Labrador to Melbourne and back again! You've read a hundred tales of their fierce deeds, their heartless cruelty, of their clever tricks devised to outwit wary seamen. But the laurels for unbelievable cunning go to a small group of marauders living on the shores of Norway in the early part of the 16th century. Long before submarines were invented, these ingenious sea bandits used queer submersible boats made of leather to capture otherwise unobtainable prizes.

These boats resembled an inverted Eskimo kayak, the pirates suspending themselves beneath. Sufficient ballast was carried to allow them to travel just beneath the surface as would a water-soaked log, and enough air was confined under the boat to allow them to remain submerged for some time. The tops of the craft were painted a sea-blending color or otherwise camouflaged to thwart detection.

Lying in wait along the shores until some heavily laden merchantman was becalmed, they would enter their queer craft, one or two men to a boat, and paddle stealthily out to the ship, traveling a few feet below the surface.

Gaining the sides of the ship, they would force holes in the wooden hull below the waterline, letting in the sea. The pirates would then retire to a safe distance until the frightened crew, seeing that their ship was mysteriously sinking, had taken to the boats, then they would release their ballast, pop up to the surface, turn their boats over and clamber in—their submarines converted into surface boats!

The party would then split; half of them hastily towing the ship into shallow waters while their comrades captured the defenseless seamen in the boats. The captured crew would be disposed of at leisure and the ship's cargo transferred to storehouses on land.

Because no survivors were left to warn those who were to follow, this type of piracy flourished for some time. Authority for this weird tale comes from an old Latin manuscript. It is said that one of these queer submarines was captured and displayed in Paris in the year 1505. *Cyrus Porter.*

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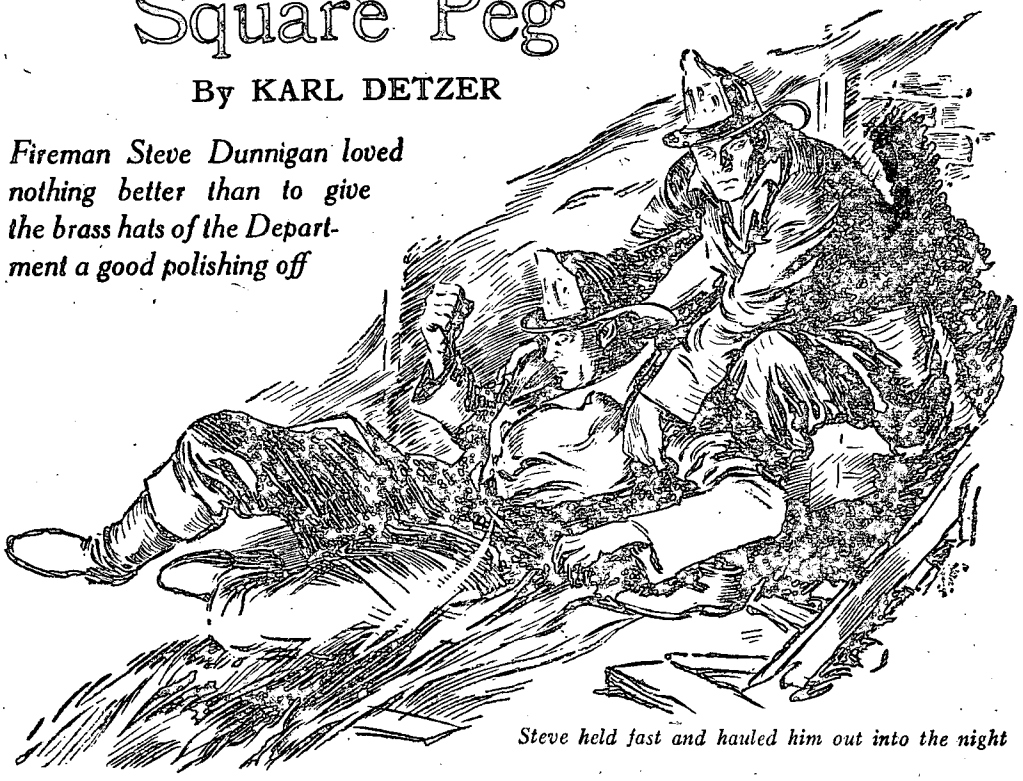
Square Peg

By KARL DETZER

Fireman Steve Dunnigan loved nothing better than to give the brass hats of the Department a good polishing off



Steve held fast and hauled him out into the night

TO understand fully what happened to Steve Dunnigan, you must keep forever in mind that one man's meat may be another man's poison, that valor is an attribute of the heart rather than the head, and that there are times when salt water is thicker than blood. Remember these and several other facts, which concern —more or less—Steve Dunnigan and Deputy Marshal Coyne and human nature and the mills of the gods.

Steve was born for the Better Life, for which statement Father Hogan is the undisputed authority. But like many another man in these wild days, he found an unholy pleasure in rearranging the stars in his own zodiac. By the time he was twenty-one even Father Hogan, grown somewhat embittered now, was willing to concede the bout to the devil by a clean knock-out, and hand over the trophy, which was Steve's unregenerate soul.

Steve was handsome, then, in a loose, pinkish way. He had a complexion like a girl's, a headful of tumbled reddish hair, and lips so thin that there was something brittle in his smile. He stood a scant six feet, and his hips were slender but his arms too long, so that his large hands hung like a pair of mauls at the ends of them.

Young women found him entrancing, and older women referred to him as "picturesque," which was enough, of course, to make even a blessed saint jerk off his halo and roll it up the street for a hoop on a Saturday night. The trouble began at the seminary, from which Steve was expelled with only a shoestring of learning, over which it

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was easy to trip. Father Hogan took it worse than he did. Steve merely shipped aboard a schooner which Fate, in the shape of a tugboat, was pushing into a wharf down on the waterfront.

Five years he sailed. Then one quiet night the schooner, loaded with limestone, sank under his feet. Steve found himself back in the city, with all his worldly possessions on his back.

Of course Fate returned to plague him. She had thickened his arrogant blood with salt; but now, perversely, she offered at the moment no other ship. No sail, that is—and Steve had a fine contempt for anything else. But, particular or not, a man must eat; and while Steve was in this state of mind and stomach, some one—perhaps a more orthodox Dunnigan—switched him into the path of a smooth-talking ward leader who was palming jobs in one hand like a magician, and gripping in the other a knotty club.

"So I joined the fire department," Steve would tell you, "to take my weight off the sidewalk."

THE little god in a red helmet, who sits aloft striking matches, was kind to Steve Dunnigan. He was mentioned in orders for bravery three times in his probationary year. While he swung from cornice to ladder rung, saving the unimportant lives of several obscure citizens, his long arms and his training aboard the schooner proved more useful to him than seminary history, either sacred or profane.

He was then serving in the Eighth Battalion, which young Bernard P. Coyne commanded. Chief Coyne, on whose lapel had sprouted the crossed bugles of chieftainship at the age of twenty-nine, had a liking for young men of spirit. Spirit plus water puts out fire, and so he called Steve Dunnigan to his office and larded him with fatherly advice.

Steve listened attentively, reserving comment till the end.

"And I've got this to say," Coyne finished. "I'll be keeping my eye on you. So work hard, my boy, study the business. Don't be afraid of long hours or doing more than your share. It's that, I tell you, makes great men. Hard work and more hard work."

"Begging your pardon, sir," Steve corrected him, "I think what you say is a line of the bunk, if I get your meaning clear. I've seen a bit of the world, sir, and I've learned a thing or two. I'll do no more than my share, for some fat officer to get the credit for; and as for lugging those people down the other day, that was nothing. You or any other brass hat could have done it."

Of course Chief Coyne was astonished at this impudence and told Steve so; but that, likewise, made no difference to Steve. And after he was gone, Coyne had to admit to himself that the young man had a certain perception. The formula for success which Coyne had laid down was one of those rules proved almost entirely by its exceptions. But it was a good rule, at that, Coyne decided; and no upstart of a mere probationer, had he sailed a thousand times around the globe, had the right to dispute the copy books. So he watched Steve as he had promised, but with an eye more critical than it otherwise would have been.

Therefore, he was not entirely unprepared when old Captain Higgins of Engine 44 tramped into his headquarters one summer afternoon.

"I've a ree-cruit in my company," Higgins began, "that would be a gilded ornament to the house o' correction, chief."

"Dunnigan?" Coyne guessed.

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"The same. I admit he's a fireman. Got his good points, and I don't dispute it. But they say even the devil is kind to his mother, sir."

"What's your trouble, Higgins?" Coyne asked.

"My trouble is that I can put my thumb on nothing to write charges against. It's his general conduct, sir. Not what he says or does. It's the look in his eye. He's got no more respeck than a tomcat for his betters. Sure, and he obeys. With his flannel mouth tight shut and his tongue shoved into his cheek like a wad of snuff. And his eyes making light of your age an' dignity, and mayhap a very small impudent tap of his toe on the floor."

Chief Coyne said, "I understand perfect. The thing to do is ignore him."

"THEN," Captain Higgins went on, "there's his blasted book."

"Book?"

"A most disgustin' kind of scrapbook."

"A bawdy scrapbook?" Coyne demanded, sitting up straighter.

"Well, it's not what you'd hardly call bawdy, sir. It's worse. Just today I hear him reading out loud from it to the other men, and them having a laugh. I say, 'It's disrespeckful, making sport of your betters,' and he gives me that look out of his eye."

"Sport of his betters?" Coyne repeated. "Now, what sort of scraps does he keep in this book?"

"Mistakes," Higgins confided. "It's a compendyum of most unfortunate errors. About judges what send the wrong men to jail, and detectifs waitin' outside the wrong door, and high-priced doctors mixin' up the wrong babies, and policemen firing madly at innocent bystanders. You'd be surprised what a collection of bystanders he's got, sir. And generals—many generals, of all colors—that get careless with ambushes, and the like."

Chief Coyne laughed.

"It's a silly pastime for a grown man," he admitted, "but after all, captain . . ."

"But mostly," Higgins persisted, "it's full of newspaper pieces about the fire department. Just yesterday, when you didn't pull the second alarm in that garage smudge till it was too late—"

"I saw that piece in the paper," Coyne said curtly. "It was written up very unfortunate.—And this Dunnigan has it in his scrapbook?"

"Yes, sir. It was that the men was laughing about."

"I'll see Dunnigan. We can't have such disrespect. Thank you for telling me, captain."

That night in his office, Chief Coyne studied the rule book, turning page after page with a broad, moist thumb. He discovered immediately that one trouble with department regulations was that they were too specific. Disrespect was confined entirely to spoken words, to uncouth noises, nose thumbing and the like. There was nothing about a look in a cold blue eye; nothing about scrapbooks.

The chief was a brave man, however, so he called Steve in next morning, and talked earnestly for an hour. But when Steve departed, he went down the stair whistling that most touching ballad about a little bit of heaven dropping out the sky one day. He was not properly impressed.

In fact, so far as Coyne could discover, the fellow had no respect for anything.—They had not, as it happened, mentioned ships.

News of the scrapbook spread across the department like ink on a blotter. Marshals and battalion chiefs, captains

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and lieutenants, heard of it glumly, and at once offered reliable alibis. Didn't the best head in the world make a mistake sometime? But the more examples they cited in proof, the more ridiculous they became and the louder the men in ranks laughed.

Clippings multiplied — "Faster'n clinkers in hell," Steve boasted. "Thinkin' it over, I'm for givin' a prize to the company as turns in the most amusin' example of rattle-headedness on the part of their esteemed commander. Got to have a two-cent stamp with it, and not more'n twenty-five words of the officer's alibi, to be printed in the smart sayin' of children department.—What'll the prize be? Oh, I ain't decided yet. Maybe a teethin' ring would be appropriate."

THE book became an institution, of course. Volume One found a niche in departmental opinion somewhere between the Honor Roll and the unhappy list of Dismissals for Cause. When Steve boldly announced Volume Two, Chief Coyne was forced to decide that, laughter or not, something must be done.

"The thing's worse than gasoline," Captain Higgins complained.

"I'll light a match to it," Chief Coyne promised.

But he was curiously slow in going about it, and in one week Steve's collection was enlivened by three new clippings. In a music store, Captain Higgins wet down fifty thousand dollars worth of grand pianos on the first floor, when the fire was confined to the basement. Steve had been four years in the department then, and was Number 3 pipeman, taking his place at the left side of the nozzle butt on the first lay-in.

"I think it's reflection we see, sir," he warned Higgins. "We best look around a bit before making a stream."

But Higgins, fretting to put out the fire before Engine 98 could lay its hose, cried impatiently: "Are you the captain of this outfit, maybe?—Water! Charge the line!"

The owner of the store complained to the chief of department, and Captain Higgins wore out the points of two pens tapping them on the desk while he searched for words to clothe his emaciated explanation. It was no use. Newspaper headlines lifted their eyebrows, and Steve bought a new pot of paste.

Next, in a lumber yard, a deputy marshal, rubbing his sleepy eyes, signalled, "All out!" at two o'clock in the morning. And three hours later he was routed from bed again and forced to call twenty pumpers to rectify his error.

Steve's third clipping concerned Battalion Chief Coyne himself; and the incident, which began on the twenty-ninth of May in the basement of a rag warehouse, would have ended disastrously in the trial room of the city hall had not a certain Mrs. Horowitz slept too soundly on the night of the first of June.

Smoke in the rag basement was thick as cold gravy when Captain Higgins' men laid in their line; and thrice, Engine 44 had to drop pipe and run for air. Then Coyne hurried down and ordered, "Move up, you! Get over where the fire's at!"

"I don't know my way about," Higgins coughed.

"Then you'd best learn," Coyne answered sharply, and bored ahead through the smoke. "Follow me."

But a charged line of fire hose is stiff as a frozen rattlesnake, and more deadly; so that it was thirty seconds or perhaps a minute before it was pulled

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forward and bent, in a proper double arc to prevent vibration-rub, around a corner of the concrete wall.

Then Higgins cried, "Where at, chief?"

But the chief did not answer. There sounded only the distant grumble of fire in rag bales, and Higgins repeated his cry. The next instant a new hot smoke, set free by some opened door, wadded itself in Higgins' throat, and he screamed, "Out o' here!" and shut off his nozzle, dropped line and ran.

His men scrambled after him.

COYNE did not reappear. A deputy marshal and three captains consulted and called for volunteers. Of course the men of Engine 44 offered to go in, as they were expected to; and the deputy marshal, observing Steve Dunnigan's tight lips and his long arms, nodded to him and he burrowed into the smoke.

He did not find Coyne at once, and was ready to go back outside for a mouthful of air, when he accidentally thrashed through the dark into the chief's legs. Coyne had fallen, choking, but he was already scrambling to his feet.

A current of air drifted along the floor—not good air, but at least a lighter smoke, cooler and easier to breathe.

Steve yelled: "Get down, chief, down here!"

But Coyne, groggy with carbon fumes, only cried out again and struggled; whereupon Steve tripped him deftly, and jerking none too gently at the officer's white slicker, dragged him toward the stair. Coyne fought him, kicked, laying open Steve's cheek and yelling that he needed no rescue, but Steve held fast and hauled him out into the night.

"Next time you want a nap, you best take it at home," Steve grunted, feeling his bleeding cheek, "before somebody else gets half killt, comin' in to wake you up."

Chief Coyne struggled with voice and temper. By the time he had mastered the one, Steve was gone. He had hurried, in fact. With as near an approach to conscience as he ever had, he suspected that he had gone a trifle far. For a chief newly rescued and trembling with smoke sickness is still a chief, even though he may look more like a bundle of salvaged rags.

Coyne's memory was good, his dignity affronted; and he resented having been lost in the basement, resented Steve's big-handed method of rescue. Most of all he resented the clipping which, inevitably, would appear in the scrapbook in Steve's locker, and the mirth it would provoke.

Therefore, he went back to quarters and immediately wrote out charges of insubordination to be submitted to the board.

The god in the red helmet, looking down through smoke, was troubled this time for Steve Dunnigan, and he acted quickly. Three days later he struck another match and hurled it straight into the apartment of Mrs. Horowitz, whose own brother was Alderman Berg, chairman of the committee on fire department affairs.

Mrs. Horowitz was not a little woman, and when she slept, she put her soul into the process—in spite of the fact that she lived on the sixth floor of a wood-joist apartment house, erected before the days of the building code. Fire was r o a r i n g up dumb waiter shafts, streaking on silent feet along d u s t y hall carpets, mushrooming against ceilings clothed in plaster so thin that the wooden lath showed

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through it. And still Mrs. Horowitz slept.

THE second alarm, at three o'clock that foggy Sabbath morning, brought Engine 44 screaming from the south. Already the fire had cut the building in two, isolating the rear half, where Mrs. Horowitz was now perched on a sixth floor window sill, in a nightgown shrunk by many washings.

A maze of fences and narrow courts behind the building made rescue by any orthodox method impossible; and so, when Engine 44 roared down the alley, its hose flapping off the tailboard, Steve Dunnigan grabbed a coil of stout line from atop the box, and a pompier hook from the tool basket of a ladder truck. Then he performed gymnastics on the hot brick wall.

He climbed like an ape—or like an old schooner man—reaching upward with long-armed confidence, mounting higher and steadily higher, while all New Babylon, watching below, rubbed smoke out of its eyes and paid him the golden homage of silence. He caught Mrs. Horowitz about her fleshy middle, made fast the rope, and forgetful of her weight or dignity, cast her out into the night, while he let the line down slowly, braking it against the window sill.

When at last she was safe aground, he took time to hook to his slicker a cage which housed a small, swooning canary, and stepping over the sill, he carried it safely down with him, sliding the line airily, like an angel descending from Heaven. All to the glory of the department, the rapture of Mrs. Horowitz, and the consternation of Battalion Chief Coyne.

Alderman Berg, who was a student of human nature as well as of civic affairs, made of Steve's action a major issue which for a day supplanted in the headlines certain graft investigations which were coming perilously close to Alderman Berg. The result was favorable to both men, of course. Citizens wagged their heads and reminded one another that Berg had a good heart, anyhow, thinking so much of his sister, and praising that young fireman . . . What if a bit of change *was* passed, here and there, in politics?

Thus, because Steve did what any fireman was expected to but did it with a touch of the spectacular, and particularly because Alderman Berg was chairman of the committee for fire department affairs, Chief Coyne's charges never were filed. And within three months Steve pinned a lieutenant's single silver bugle on his coat lapel.

Captain Higgins was immensely gratified by this promotion, for Steve was removed at once from Engine 44 and assigned to Ladder Truck 9.

"It's a wonder he'd take promotion, talkin' about good officers the way he does. We'll see now! He can play the ape to his black heart's content—and good riddance!" Higgins said, and registered only a snort next New Year's day, when Steve was granted the medal for valor by a great newspaper which reverenced front page heroics, particularly if performed on an otherwise very dull Sunday.

STEVE climbed right on after that. He shinned the rungs of promotion; served on engines, ladders, squads and rescue crews; baited his superiors; ruined subordinates by too much familiarity; and a dozen times, by the breadth of one of his red hairs, escaped dismissal.

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He labored a dozen years as lieutenant. He was not old—only forty—but his joints were stiffening—hot smoke and cold water do that—when Fate stepped jubilantly in again, and he replaced his single bugle with the twin trumpets of a captain and was ordered down town to command Engine 22. Chief Coyne was a deputy marshal now, potbellied and cantankerous; and the little god in a red helmet, who liked a good joke for its own sake, pulled the wires which sent Steve back to Coyne's division.

Of course, Chief Coyne objected to his transfer. Not publicly, for who dared challenge too openly a man with so many medals on his chest, or so many violent partisans, or who had only to climb a short ladder to throw the newspapers into columns of inaccurate ecstasy? Or who carried with him three scrapbooks full of dynamite, which needed only a spark, on the short fuse of his temper, to set them off, and have all the department howling with laughter and all the citizens demanding investigations of higher officers who made so many mistakes?

But Chief Coyne objected, just the same, and waited. Steve moved into his new quarters, which squatted in an obscure side street surrounded by sooty lofts, and shook hands vigorously with his new crew. The first night, sitting behind the apparatus room, he regaled them with anecdotes reflecting on the infallibility of division and deputy marshals, and even chiefs of department.

The men liked him. They approved his hearty familiarity, enjoyed the tales he told, stories of ships and far seas, of thirst and mutiny. The details might be obscured by distance, the characters foggy with age; but the point invariably was the same. Only aboard ship, among those chosen men who follow the noble calling of the sea, was authority to be taken seriously.

"Sure, and out there you can be cousin to all the aldermen in the world, and how far does that get you?" he asked. "No farther'n I can heave a thousand-gallon pumper!"

He slipped down frequently to the waterfront. The salt breeze blew sweet in his nose; but for some mysterious reason that he never could explain, he always returned irritably to quarters. More and more, the business irked him. Rules were increasing these days, and he hated the constant talk about efficiency. Paper work piled up among the tobacco crumbs on his desk. As for the new, ridiculous regulations about uniforms, the night he read them he resigned from the department.

"Expect a man to wear his best serge every time he sticks his head in the apparatus room?" Steve exploded. "They'll be insistin' on tail coats on watch desk after supper, maybe," he roared, "and a carnation in the buttonhole when we roll down the avenue!"

Next morning, however, he tore up the resignation. The men had persuaded him. He was their ally, the friend of the down-trodden, and they could not afford to lose him. But the regulations persisted.

A SINGLE beam of sunlight was the fact that he met Chief Coyne less frequently. Deputy marshals command six battalions in their districts. Their visits to single companies are far between, and besides, Coyne stayed away from Steve's outfit as long as he could, for he finally had mastered the profound truth that a sleeping dog, no matter how cross, never bites.

He had not visited Engine 22 for nearly three months, when one blister-

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ing mid-summer afternoon his shining red buggy halted at the curb and he climbed out. He was in dress uniform, newly pressed and with shining buttons, and he carried a pair of gloves and wore a stiff white collar. He was as immaculate as an angel's conscience.

Steve, slouching barefooted like a beach comber at the rear of the apparatus room, in armless undershirt and soiled breeches, came slowly to attention as Coyne appeared.

"Where's the captain at?" the deputy asked pointedly as he looked Steve over, taking in every slipshod inch of him, from sweating forehead to large, naked toes.

"I'm here, sir," Steve answered, and his annoyance grew at the trim sight of his superior. "Don't wear out your spectacles lookin' at me. I just finished holdin' my head under the water tap to ward off the heat. It was very cooling, sir, which I might say would not hurt yourself."

"I thank you for the idea," Coyne snorted, "which gives me another. A few manners, now you're growing older, wouldn't hurt anybody."

But Steve persisted, warming to his subject.

"Because," he continued, "if you'd hold your head under the tap, sir, it might cool off. Then you'd regain your senses and throw away them fancy gloves and not prance about the streets dressed up like the militia on so hot a day!"

The chief went scarlet. He shouted, "Dunnigan!"

"No offense, sir. If you've a hanker to bedeck yourself and walk the streets like a . . ."

He was interrupted, and Coyne was spared an attack of apoplexy, by an impudent gong on the wall.

It tapped an excited message in a strident voice, and Dunnigan yelled: "Roll, men, roll!"

Coyne shouted after him, "I'll fix you this time, Dunnigan—you and your damn book!"

Steve yanked boots over bare toes, clawed into slicker, jammed on helmet and leaped to the pumper. He had heard threats before.

Traffic, like a sluggish python, coiled heavily about his apparatus, so that two other engines and a ladder truck already had reported before Steve could sight the first smoke. It was hot smoke, rising fast on a small breeze. It sprouted, dirty yellow and gray, from the head of a soiled, slatternly loft propped between two sturdier buildings which supported it like two policemen at either side of a drunk.

Steve's eyes quickly took in the ground floor store room; its windowful of shoddy raincoats; the printer's sign on the second story; and above that, three levels of dusty windows which indicated vacant floors. He observed, also, that smoke seeped from basement gratings, rolled through the open doors and bloomed on the roof.

This indicated that the fire was climbing, that already it had streaked up the elevator shaft from the basement. A battalion chief, standing with folded arms like a Bonaparte in a white helmet, ordered Steve's company to the rear roof.

"Up top?" Steve protested. "Why, that shell's eaten up! Put my men on top?"

"That's what I said," the battalion chief replied.

GROWLING, Steve led his men aloft. He took up position on the tin roof, where heat pounding upward met the downpouring heat of the sun. Fire was already sticking

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impudent tongues from the elevator penthouse, and for thirty blistering minutes Steve poured water against it from his three-quarter-inch tip.

Then, beneath his feet, he heard roof beams groan.

"Got to move back," he ordered his company, "little nearer the edge."

They were willing. But just then Deputy Marshal Coyne climbed over the cornice. He still was angry, still faintly defensive. Over his dress uniform he wore a white slicker that gaped at the throat, disclosing a wilted stiff collar.

"Quitting?" he shouted. "There's a piece for your book!—Dunnigan gone yellow!"

"Yeah!" Steve answered. Sweat ran into his mouth and he spat it out. "Yellow as a brass hat."

"What's that?" Coyne roared. "What you say?"

"Nothing," Steve grunted, "yet."

"Then maybe you'll do what I tell you. Stay here. Keep your men here."

"Guess again," Steve said. He called over his shoulder to his men, "Move back, ready to get down."

They looked blankly at him, uneasily at the chief.

"I'm talking for him," Steve added. "He's forgot how. Back up, if you want to get down alive!"

"No!" Coyne shouted. His crimson, furious face was so close that Steve saw the red rims of his eyes and the small gold fillings in his teeth. "You'll not get by with this, Dunnigan! You heard me!"

"One side!" Steve answered. "Sure, I heard you. What of it? I've got men to take care of."

The chief danced, impotent. Steve's hosemen were crawling backward along their line, pressing it against the hot roof with the weight of their chunky bodies. Steve alone grasped the brass nozzle. He crouched on one knee, his long arms wrapped capably about the pipe, short stout fingers guiding the tip.

"I'll file my charges this time, Dunnigan," Coyne was yelling. His voice broke, tripped up on his fury. "I'll get your bugles . . ."

"Get 'em, then," Steve answered. His thin lips pressed into a tight, cold line. "Get 'em and toot 'em to hell and back!"

Coyne bent over him. He had opened his big mouth, but no words had roared out of it, when once more the roof beams creaked. A death rattle sounded in the elevator shaft, and the whole stricken building moaned and trembled violently.

Steve yelled, "Hurry, men!"

He waited where he was until he saw them clawing downward on the fire escape ladder. Coyne had straightened and stood with mouth gaping, consternation in his eyes. The roof sagged.

Behind Coyne's shoulder, in a crevice between tall buildings, Steve saw briefly, like a mocking dream, the cool, serene waters of the bay.

And suddenly he knew. That's where he belonged—out there on water. That was the trouble with him. He'd been a fool. Too late now . . .

THE roof tilted precipitously, bricks roared, fire rose in a great wall ahead of him. He felt Coyne's boots in his ribs, then pain like a thousand scorpions stabbing at his eyes. He rolled interminably, brought up against something hard, and tried to open his eyes. But he could not open them. Flame had sewed them shut.

He climbed to his hands and knees. The blaze roared closer. He was lost. Blind. He would burn.

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"That blasted Coyne!"

Then Coyne's voice cried savagely, near at hand: "I heard you. Lift this beam off me! My leg's broke!"

Steve fumbled and Coyne's voice called again, "Right here! Can't you see?"

"No," Steve answered. "Where you at?"

"Right here. Give me a hand. But listen, 'fore you do it! I warn you, I'll file charges, Dunnigan, when we get down!—Remember it!"

Steve, grunting, bent over, searching with stiff fingers.

"Are you blind?" Coyne asked.

"Yes," Steve said. "Now I got you. Lay still. I'll lift you."

He hoisted the deputy to his back; crawling through wreckage, sought the fire escape ladder, a distant, almost unachievable goal. And whether he wished to or not, he must take Coyne's directions.

"Left, now straight. Left again.—I tell you, Dunnigan, I'll file charges, you don't belong in this department, you never have belonged . . ."

Steve was panting. "That's all right," he growled.

"Straight ahead.—What's all right?"

"Charges. Think of the nice piece this will make for the scrapbook.—Which way now?"

"Left," Coyne bade hoarsely.

At the fire escape, the men of Engine 22, racing upward, caught them and carried them down.

It was a month before Steve could read the charges which Coyne had filed, two months before he sat in the trial room. Deputy and district marshals, smoking black cigars, lined the long table and asked sharp questions.

"You are guilty, Dunnigan," the chairman reported at the end. "However, in view of your record—and the fact that you did save Chief Coyne—furthermore, because of the attitude of the newspapers, we have decided not to dismiss you, although you surely deserve it."

"You can't get along without me?" Steve said.

"Instead," the chairman persisted, "you will be transferred to the marine division."

Steve opened his mouth to exclaim, but again was silenced.

"Don't kick. It won't do any good. We know it's a tough spot, commanding a fire boat. That's why we're putting you there. We know you won't want to go to the boats—nobody does. That's your punishment."

"Thank you, sir," Steve said gratefully. Punishment? He moistened his lips with his tongue and could taste the good salt already there. He would never tell them.

THAT was two years ago.

Ask the chief of department to-day about Steve Dunnigan and he has this to say:

"The man's a wonder. Rotten commander on land companies. Always unruly. But he's black magic on that boat. Best officer in the fleet! Sent down for punishment; and would you believe it? he refuses to come ashore. Says the salt stiffens his spine. Of course, he's still got one failing. A scrapbook—a most unfortunate book. But just the same, it's wonderful what discipline does for a man!"

Whenever he hears the chief say those words, the little god, sitting on his smoke cloud, pauses at his eternal lighting of matches, and waves his red helmet jubilantly.

THE END.

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There was a glimmer of red on the cuff of her uniform

The Magpie Murders

By GEORGE F. WORTS

Author of "Black Ice," "The Grapevine Murders," etc.

"I suspect every one!" Gillian Hazeltine told the strangely assorted members of that wealthy household—and then a second murder proved he had reason

THE CHARACTERS:

GILLIAN HAZELTINE, famous lawyer-detective visiting Sunrise Towers to investigate certain mysterious happenings culminating in the murder of Sylvia Stranahan.

VEE HAZELTINE, Gillian's pretty red-haired wife. She dislikes every one in the household. Sylvia's attitude toward Vee, just before the crime occurred, had been insulting; and Vee became infuriated. In the midst of a violent rainstorm, just before the murder had been discovered, Gillian saw Vee go out of the house. She was wearing her bathing suit, and he supposed she was going for a swim in the outdoor pool.

JANE JORDON, pretty but calculating owner of Sunrise Towers, which has come to her from her divorced millionaire husband, Mark Jordon. By nature jealous, Jane had always hated her twin sister, the dead Sylvia. Sylvia had been dependent upon Jane, and Jane had given Sylvia a small, rose-covered cottage on the estate to live in. It was in this cottage that Sylvia had been brutally murdered, the weapon

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being a baseball bat. Rose petals had showered down upon the blood-spattered spot; and tucked under one arm of the dead woman was a dead magpie, one of a pair which were the pets of

INSPECTOR MICHAEL MORAN, living on the charity of his wealthy niece, Jane Jordon. Paralyzed as the result of a bullet wound while a detective, he is now confined to a wheel chair. Nevertheless, he has been observed to move this chair about without the help of

MISS LORE KALTENBORN, Inspector Moran's new nurse.

RAYMOND LIBBY, an architect employed by Jane Jordon. Both Jane and Sylvia had been jealously in love with him, though he had hated Sylvia and favored only Jane. Once a suitor of Vee Hazeltine's, he developed a violent dislike for her when she turned him down.

DICK MORAN, Jane's aviator brother, who is teaching her to fly her new airplane. He bears an old grudge against Vee Hazeltine, for she had once shown him up to be a cheap cad.

CAPTAIN HOLCOMBE, captain of the yacht Samoa upon which Sylvia and her husband, Ronny Stranahan had honeymooned in Borneo. There Ronny Stranahan, who was a strange man interested in Oriental mysticism, discovered a diamond mine; but soon afterward he disappeared under mysterious circumstances. Captain Holcombe, and others, claim that they have recently seen Stranahan in the vicinity of Sunrise Towers. Aside from Ronny Stranahan himself, Sylvia and Holcombe were the only persons who had known the exact location of the diamond mine. Now that Sylvia is dead, this knowledge is confined to Holcombe. He drinks heavily, and is supposed to have been deeply attached to Sylvia. Being poor and without an automobile, he has a habit of borrowing other people's cars without permission.

PETE SPRECKLES, a young man of good family, friend and adviser to Jane.

AARON SAVAGE, another young man from an excellent, though impoverished family. He is now employed as butler in Jane's household.

MYTHO JOLOR, Sylvia's furtive Indo-Chinese servant, who had discovered the murder of his mistress. He and Jane's Italian gardener sleep over the garage.

MOLLY LEE, Jane's pretty personal maid. Her background is obscure. Gillian Hazeltine had seen her, hatless and coatless, out in the rain at the time of the murder.

The COOK, and the CHAMBERMAID.

CHAPTER XII *(Continued)*.

ACCUSALS.

GILLIAN said, "Holcombe, hold that light. We're all going to the library. The first thing we're going to find out is, where every one was when that murder occurred."

"I was right here," said the inspector.

"I'm going to telephone for the police!" Holcombe cried, agony in his voice. Gillian glanced at him sharply. Had he really been in love with Sylvia Stranahan, or was this clever acting?

"By all means," Gillian said quietly.

The group in the library fell silent when the lawyer and the yacht captain returned, rolling in the inspector in his wheelchair.

Dick Moran sprang up. "Hazeltine," he said, "I want to speak to you privately."

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Gillian nodded. "Yes," he said. "Every one of you, in turn, will speak to me privately. I'll use this little study in here. Come on, Moran."

The lawyer picked up a candelabrum in which eight candles burned, and carried it into the small room which adjoined the library. This cubicle had been at one time Mark Jordon's office. It was fitted with a handsome walnut desk, and chairs. There were faded old maps, shellacked, on the walls, and in one corner stood a globe.

Dick Moran shut the door and stood with his broad back against it. His mouth was tense, and there was a grim look about his eyes.

He said harshly, "Do you know who killed my sister?"

Gillian looked at him thoughtfully and answered quietly, "Dick, where were you during the past hour?"

"Out on the field."

"You mean the flying field?"

"Yes. When I saw this storm blowing up, I went out there to see that Jane's ship was properly pegged down for the night."

"You must have gone out before dinner."

The aviator's eyes narrowed. "I did."

"Before it was dark?"

"Yes."

"Then you must have been out there almost two hours and a half—three hours."

"That's right. I was sitting in the ship. I installed a set of radium-dialed instruments a few days ago. I wanted to see how they showed up in the dark."

"Is it a cabin ship?"

"Nope. An open cockpit job."

Gillian said, "You mean you were sitting out there, in an open cockpit, through this storm?"

"Don't you believe me?" the flyer snapped.

"It's hard for me to picture a man sitting out there in this weather, in an open cockpit."

"I was thinking about all the mysterious stuff that's been going on in this house." The candle light seemed to strike sparks from the flyer's eyes. "And if you want my opinion, the same person who's at the bottom of all those so-called mysteries is the one who murdered my sister!"

"But you said you suspected Jane!"

The aviator panted, "That's who I'm talking about! Nobody in the world hated Sylvia the way Jane did!"

"I'm not so sure," Gillian murmured.

"LOOK here, Hazeltine—!"

"Don't yell at me!" Gillian barked. "You hated Sylvia as much as Jane did. You had as much to gain by her death!"

"Why! Damn you, Hazeltine! You—" He stopped; gasped. "If it wasn't Jane, then it was Raymond Libby! Didn't he hate her? Wasn't she balling up his sweet little plan to marry Jane for her jack?"

"I'm of the opinion that Libby was reluctant to marry Jane because he was so poor. His pride is a terrible thing."

"That's a lot of bunk. Sylvia was making trouble for Libby. Why couldn't he have killed her to get her out of his way?"

"Well, let's get this straight. You don't suspect Jane, then, of killing Sylvia? You suspect Libby?"

"I don't say I don't suspect Jane.—Say! You're a hell of a detective! I know what I know. What are you trying to do—rattle me?"

"I don't have to try," Gillian growled.

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"No? Why are you wasting so much time? Why don't you do something about Jane? Believe me, I grew up with those girls! I know Jane hated Sylvia enough to bump her off. What surprises me is that it hasn't happened before—years ago! You saw the shape Sylvia's in out there. Beaten to death by somebody in a fit of absolute fury! You don't know how those girls used to fight when they were kids!"

"How do you explain the dead magpie?"

"Clever! An afterthought! But maybe not even that. Sylvia talked too much. They called her the magpie."

"Didn't they call them both the magpies?"

"They called each other magpies! Jane killed Sylvia because of the way she's been horning in on that architect! I knew something like this would happen."

Dick Moran, backed against the door, was breathing rapidly through parted, pale lips. Gillian, still feeling more than a little ill, marvelled at a family so divided that a brother could forsake his sister at a time like this. But he could not blame the flyer, because he himself shared Dick Moran's opinion of the jealous twins.

"Look for fingerprints on that baseball bat," Dick Moran said, "and you'll find they're Jane's!"

"No," Gillian said, "we won't find anybody's fingerprints on the baseball bat."

"Why not?"

"Because of the magpie."

"I don't get you."

"I'll have another talk with you later—if you don't mind. Will you please send Molly Lee in?"

The aviator stared at him. "Good God!" he breathed. "Do you suspect for a moment—?"

"Frankly, I suspect everybody under this roof. There isn't a person here who hasn't some motive."

Dick Moran ran the fingers of one hand through his curly, reddish-brown hair. He stared a moment longer, then opened the door.

A babble of voices came surging into the little office. It was evident that Inspector Moran was conducting an investigation on his own account, and that everybody was explaining at once.

CHAPTER XIII.

TYPIST.

MOLLY LEE came in. Her small, oval face was as white as chalk. In it her dark eyes, under their long, sweeping lashes, the delicate pencilling of her brows, were enormous. Here, unless Gillian was mistaken, was a thoroughly frightened girl. But her terror was not what interested him.

He said sharply, "What's your real name?"

Her eyes seemed to open wider still, until they were pits of terrified darkness. But she was trying to master herself. Her hands, at her sides, were clenched fists. She was visibly trembling.

"Molly Lee," she answered.

He looked at her for several seconds. "Molly Lee," he said, "is not your real name. You might just as well come clean. Sooner or later, we'll find out who you really are. Why not save us that trouble?"

She said in the same low, breathless voice, "My name is Molly Lee."

The lawyer took out a cigar, bit off the end and lighted it without removing his eyes from hers. The maid's eyes had a liquid quality. Their darkness

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made it impossible for him to see the pupils. They were large, softly shining spots in a face white and tense with terror.

Gillian knew that he had seen her somewhere before, but his usual excellent memory failed him. He was convinced that she was masquerading.

"Where were you during the past hour and a half?"

"In my room."

"You mean, you were there all evening?"

"Yes, sir."

"You weren't out of the house all this time?"

She stared at him. Her mouth opened; formed a perfect circle. He waited for her to scream; he was sure she was going to scream. But she did not scream.

"Why," he said quietly, "are you lying?"

She cried, "It sounds so—so absurd!"

"Things are apt to sound absurd at a time like this. What were you doing out there by the lilac bushes?"

The maid's mouth opened again, and closed. She said, faintly, "I—I love a storm. I love the wind. Of course, you don't understand that."

"You might try explaining it," Gillian said dryly.

"What's there to explain? I say, I love the wind! I like the feeling of it blowing through my hair, blowing hard against me! That's all! I love to go out in a storm and stand there and let it blow—blow through me!"

"That's what you were doing, all that time? In the rain?"

"I didn't mind the rain."

"You changed your clothes, of course."

"Yes. I was soaked. I put on dry clothes."

He said with sudden sharpness, "Who do you think killed Sylvia Stranahan?"

"CAPTAIN HOLCOMBE!" she cried.

"What makes you so sure?"

"I saw him drive up in your wife's car from Portersville, then get out and walk toward the rose cottage!"

"Did you see him go into the cottage?"

"It was too dark. I only saw him as far as the light on the *porte cochère* lighted him."

"Mightn't he have walked around the house—toward, say, the conservatory?"

"Yes. But he seemed to be going straight to the rose cottage."

"Will you explain to me how a man can 'seem' to be going straight to any place?"

"I mean," she said breathlessly, "in light of what happened. His air was so mysterious and furtive and grim."

"But," Gillian said, "you didn't see him actually go toward the rose cottage, once he turned the corner—got beyond the zone of the *porte cochère* light?"

"No, sir."

"You still don't feel like telling me your real name?"

"I've told you my real name."

"Where is your wet dress?"

"In my room."

He looked at her eyes for a long time, then at her hands. They were small but very capable looking hands.

"Let me see your hands," he said.

Molly Lee held them out. In spite of her efforts to control them, they were shaking.

He took both of her hands, turned them over and looked at her fingers in

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the candlelight. He looked a long time at the slim white fingers.

"You use a typewriter," he said. "But you don't use the touch system. You use only the forefinger of each hand."

She snatched her hands away. "I use a portable typewriter for writing letters. It's in my room."

"I want to see that room later, and I want you to keep away from it in the meantime. Whom do you suspect of throwing your pillow out of your window the other night?"

"The same person who killed Mrs. Stranahan!"

Gillian opened the door. Inspector Moran was the center of a semicircle of excitedly talking people. Gillian studied them. He looked at the two white-faced women, Jane and his wife. Though they stood near each other, Jane's back was deliberately turned toward her guest. She seemed to be utterly unaware of Vee's presence. They were like ghosts. He had never seen Vee so pale.

His eyes drifted to the aviator, who was standing with arms folded on chest, chin down, jaw slightly thrust out. Then to the Indo-Chinese, whose yellow face seemed to swim in a mist.

Gillian's eyes returned to the group about the inspector, came to rest on Raymond Libby. Nothing of the architect's face was visible but his eyes. His hand covered his chin and mouth. His forehead reflected candle light like wet ivory.

He looked up and saw Gillian regarding him. His hand dropped down. His mouth was open. Gillian made a gesture with his head. The architect slowly got up and walked, as if on uncertain feet, toward him.

Captain Holcombe came rushing into the room.

"Hazeltine," he panted, "somebody's cut every telephone line in this house! There she is, lying out there—dead! We've got to do something! Somebody's trying to prevent us from getting the police!"

Inspector Moran said irritably, "Don't be a damned fool! What can a flock of hick constables do that Hazeltine and I can't do?"

Captain Holcombe ignored the inspector. "That fake paralytic," he snarled, "has changed his clothes since dinner time! Why did he change them? Maybe you can answer that, Hazeltine!"

"Captain," Gillian said, "you've got to pull yourself together."

The yacht captain dazedly wiped his hand over his eyes; and with a groan, sank into a chair.

CHAPTER XIV.

ASHES.

WHEN the door of the little office was closed, Raymond Libby sat down gingerly on the edge of a chair. Gillian saw that the architect was under a tremendous nervous strain. This was not, of course, remarkable. Every man and woman under this roof had a right to be under a tremendous nervous strain. But what was Raymond Libby trying so hard to conceal?

Gillian quietly questioned him. Where had he been at the time of the murder?

The architect had clasped his hands in his lap. He was squeezing them so hard that his knuckles were white.

"I was in the gallery."

"You mean, the art gallery?"

"Y-yes. I went there immediately after that ghastly dinner. A few min-

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utes before the lights went out, I went up to my room for some fresh cigars. I mean, I was there when they went out."

His voice was tense and gritty. Obviously he was trying to make it sound natural, but he did not succeed.

Gillian bent toward him. "Raymond," he said, "who do you think killed that girl?"

The architect gasped, "I don't know! I don't know!—I haven't the slightest idea!"

He licked his gray lips. Gillian could see that his teeth were chattering.

—"Look here, Raymond. Are you trying to shield some one?"

"No, no, no! Certainly not!"

"You have no suspicion who it might have been?"

"None! None whatever!"

"This afternoon, in my room," Gillian said, "you were quite certain that Sylvia, with Holcombe's possible assistance, had been at the bottom of those mysterious things which have been going on."

A CURIOUS change flickered over the architect's long, thin face. It actually lasted but a split-second. It was relief. It was like a rift appearing momentarily in gloomy clouds, letting just a flicker of the sun through. Instantly gone.

"Holcombe!" Gillian snapped.

The architect started; looked at him with a strange bewilderment. "Holcombe?" he repeated, as if he hadn't heard aright.

"Why not?" Gillian persisted. "Didn't Holcombe have, by his own reasoning, justifiable cause?"

"I wonder," the architect whispered. "Wasn't he driven frantic by the fact that Sylvia did not return his love? Mightn't he have had a gainful motive? That diamond mine they discovered in Borneo? Weren't he and Sylvia the only two who knew where that mine is?"

"You may be right."

Gillian, studying him, perceived that nothing was to be gained, at least at present, by questioning this Raymond Libby.

He said, "Raymond, will you do me a favor? Will you keep an eye on that Indo-Chinese?"

"Why, of course! Do you suspect him?"

"I suspect everybody in this house."

Libby got up and went to the door. He had his nerves under better control. There was even a little color now in his face.

The door opened upon a new note of hysteria. The library contained three newcomers—a stout, terrified man with black eyes and a fierce black mustache, and two women. Gillian recognized the man as Jane's Italian gardener, and one of the two women as the chambermaid. The other, a stout, Teutonic-looking woman of about forty was, he presumed, the cook.

The aviator was talking to the three of them. The Italian was staring at him with glassy eyes. The chambermaid was crying hysterically. The cook, wet-eyed and white but stolid, was looking at him with a thick, quivering underlip.

Above the hubbub, Inspector Moran was trying to talk to Vee. Gillian saw that his wife's eyes were closed. Her chin was on her palm. In her orchid dressing gown, with her tumbled red hair, her chalk-white face, she looked suddenly strange and fragile.

Compressing his lips, Gillian said sternly, "Jane!"

She looked up at him, startled. Her eyes seemed to swim. She got to her

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feet and swayed. As if she might collapse at any moment, she followed Gillian into the little office.

JANE JORDON sank with a thin, tremulous groan into the chair that Raymond Libby had occupied. When Gillian shut the door, she said, shakily,

"Oh, darling! I'm so horribly bewildered!"

"Jane," the lawyer said sternly, "you've got to help me. You've got to control yourself."

"But I'm so sick, so confused!"

"Tell me about your servants."

"They're all absolutely trustworthy. I've had them for years."

"The gardener?"

"Tony used to work for my father. He's utterly dependable."

"Your cook?"

"Mrs. Vogle has worked for me for five years."

"The chambermaid?"

"I've had Ella just as long. The poor thing doesn't know what it's all about. The only new servants I have are Molly and Aaron."

"How long have you had Molly?"

"About a month."

"Where did you get her?"

"My brother got her for me, from an employment agency, I suppose. The maid I had before was stealing things—underwear, perfume, stockings. Dick discharged her and got Molly."

"Why did Dick discharge the other girl?"

"I was chicken-hearted about it."

That didn't sound like Jane, but he let it pass. "Did Dick suggest that you discharge your previous maid and get a new one?"

"Yes, but of what importance is it?—Gillian! Really, I can't stand much more questioning. You don't seem to realize the state I'm in. I—I feel so dizzy."

"Jane!" he said sternly.

"Yes?" she quavered.

"It isn't going to do you the least bit of good to pull any more of these fake faints. The next time you faint, I'm going to throw a bucket of ice water on you. Now, snap out of it and try to help me!"

"Darling, I am trying!—What can I tell you?"

"Did Dick suggest that he discharge your previous maid?"

"Yes, Gillian!"

"And he said he'd get you a new one?"

"Yes. And he brought Molly."

"Did she have credentials?"

"I didn't ask. I think Dick got her from an employment agency. What difference does it make? Do you suspect that child?"

"Whom do you think I suspect?"

"Captain Holcombe!" she cried breathlessly. "You know he did it!"

But her eyes were lying, and Gillian knew they were lying.

"JANE, why did you change your dress?"

"I told you!" she wailed. "I spilled apricot brandy on it!"

"Didn't you go out of the house?"

"No!"

"Did you change your shoes and stockings too?"

"Of course!"

"Why?"

"Because I spilled the brandy all over myself!"

He reached down and took her hand, pulled her out of the chair. Her hand was cold, almost as cold, Gillian suspected, as her sister's.

"I want you to show me that dress. We'll go up and look at it."

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"But it's gone! I burned it in the fireplace!"

"*Why?*"

"Because I was so furious!"

"About the brandy?"

"Of course!"

"Oh, Jane," Gillian said, and shook his head. "That dress must have cost five hundred dollars."

She gave a nervous shrug. Her eyes swam. He asked her if the door at the other end of the room they now occupied opened upon a closet.

"No. It's a private stairs. I mean, my husband used to use it."

"I want to see that dress—what's left of it," Gillian said grimly.

"Very well," Jane agreed, with equal grimness.

They went upstairs by the private stairs and to Jane's room. There was a fireplace built into one wall. It was clean except for fragments of unburned paper and a few smaller fragments of the blue dinner gown were still distinguishable.

Gillian looked about the room. A faint perfume hung in the air. It was a frivolous room, done in blue and white and gold. A modernistic dressing table against one wall might have been, except for its costly beauty, an accessory of almost any fashionable beauty parlor. Shelves under and around it were packed with bottles and jars of all shapes, sizes and colors. Golden toilet articles were scattered about.

Jane was staring at him. "Well?" she cried sharply.

He looked at her curiously, as though he did not quite see her, then glanced at her bed. He walked around it. On the floor beside the leg of the bed nearest the wall on the far side, he came upon a small gleaming amber-like mound. Stockings!

He picked them up, shook them out to their full length. The stockings were damp. He examined the feet; saw grass stains on an instep. And in one of the stockings he found, in the approximate vicinity of the center of the calf, a sharply broken thread, a cluster of runs.

"These," he said, "were the stockings you wore."

She was looking at them, wide-eyed, open-mouthed.

"You were lying. You were out of the house!"

"No!" Jane cried.

"How do you explain these grass stains?"

"I wore those stockings this afternoon."

"But why are they damp?—Feel them. They're very damp."

"I tried to wash out the brandy stains."

He looked at her sternly. "Jane, stop lying. You didn't go down to the tubs in the basement. Besides, why didn't you hang the stockings up some place to dry? You went out of this house. You went to Sylvia's cottage."

"I did not!" she cried. "I went down cellar!"

"How did you tear this stocking?"

"On a packing box—an old whisky box!"

Gillian, looking at her eyes, shook his head. "Sit down there," he said, "and put this stocking on."

"Why?"

"Because I want you to."

Jane's mouth became sullen. She was angry now. But she did as he told her. She sat down, with her back to him, and stripped off the stocking she had on. Then she put on the one with the runs in it.

"Stand up," Gillian said. He held the candles so that he could see just where the tear was that had started the

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runs. It was in back. "Where is there a tape-measure?"

"YOU make me sick, Gillian," Jane said angrily. "You're wasting time. Why don't you find out who killed Sylvia?" Terror was mingled with defiance in her eyes. "The tape-measure's in that little drawer. Wait! I'll get it!"

She got him the tape-measure. Gillian told her to stand still. He measured the little torn area in the stocking, and made a mental note of its exact height from the floor: ten and one-half inches.

He asked Jane to remove the stocking and put on the one she had been wearing. When she had done this, he rolled up the one that had been torn and stuffed it into a pocket. Then he went to the fireplace and found in the embers not only little charred fragments of her dress, but the charred remnants of the slippers she had worn. He examined every unburned item, but they furnished no evidence.

Jane, as they returned by the private stairway to the little office, indignantly accused him again of wasting time.

"You won't tell me," he said finally, "why you went outdoors when you told me you were going down for Napoleon brandy?"

"I didn't go outdoors!"

"You won't tell me why you had that horrified look in your face when you came back into the room, after changing your dress?"

"I wasn't horrified!"

"Why didn't you send Aaron for that brandy?"

They had reached the office again. Gillian set the candelabrum on the desk and looked at her. Her face was no longer white. It was faintly pink. And her eyes were still angry.

"Why," Jane cried, "don't you accuse me in so many words of killing my sister?"

"Why," he retorted, "don't you answer my questions truthfully? Do you *know* who killed your sister?"

"Captain Holcombe! He was furious at her because she didn't fall for him. He's a dead broke adventurer. How do you know he was in love with her? How do you know he wanted anything but that diamond mine? He couldn't make her marry him so he could get the mine, and consequently he killed her!"

Gillian said, "I don't think a damned thing is to be gained by talking to you."

He opened the door. With her head high, Jane Jordon walked stiffly into the library.

Inspector Moran was now cross-questioning Raymond Libby, shouting at him. The others were sitting in small groups. Every one evidently had a theory, and it was as evident that few theories harmonized.

Miss Kaltenborn's chair was as close beside the inspector's wheel-chair as it could be moved. She was watching his flushed face with parted red lips, eager dark eyes. In the candle light, her face had many interesting angles—the nose, one angle; the line of the chin another; the line of her brow, still another. Like a geometric design.

Gillian glanced at his wife. Vee was huddled in a chair, with the orchid dressing gown drawn about her, as if she were cold. Her eyes were remote, unfocused. She was staring at the inspector, but she did not see him.

"Miss Kaltenborn," Gillian called.

She looked around quickly, surprised. Her eyes widened as she saw that open door; as if, perhaps, she had been dreading the ordeal awaiting her

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in that little secret place. She hesitated and got up.

CHAPTER XV.

CLEAN UNIFORM.

GILLIAN told the nurse to sit down, and he watched her carefully as she did so. She did not tremble. She did not sink into the chair as if she were exhausted. She seemed to have herself under excellent control.

She looked up at him, her dark, wide-set eyes steady. There was soft, warm color in her olive cheeks, and her blood-red lips were parted expectantly. The impression she gave was one of capability, of self-assurance, of candor. Here was no hysteria. Yet he sensed, as he had twice before, an indefinable furtiveness, a secretiveness—even before she spoke.

That soft, troubling whisper again, so low that it could not possibly carry farther than a few feet. "Have you talked to your wife?"

He actually blinked. It was as if Miss Kaltenborn had read his thoughts. Almost irritably, he asked her why she had said that.

"You had better talk to her," was the softly whispered answer. "She is in a much more dangerous condition than you realize. It's just as if she were under some hypnotic influence—like a trance."

The lawyer, watching those blood-red lips move, said, "I seem to recall that you said something about hypnotism this afternoon."

Miss Kaltenborn nodded. "I told you—and I will tell you again, Mr. Hazeltine—that Mrs. Stranahan's husband is hiding in these woods. You have scoffed at that before, but can you be sure? Every one knows that that man was very much interested in Oriental mysticism—such things as hypnotism. How else can you account for the horrible murder of that poor child? We all assume, from what we have heard, that Mr. Stranahan was disillusioned about her—that he left her in Borneo."

"That's only a rumor!"

"Are you quite sure? Didn't Captain Holcombe say he had seen him in the village this afternoon? Every evidence points to such a motive as he might well have had. Mr. Stranahan must have hated his wife. Wasn't her murder full of such evidences?"

"The strangled magpie?" Gillian snapped.

"Why not? A fantastic, rather Oriental touch. But why do you wait to question Mrs. Hazeltine? I'm sure—"

"Never mind," the lawyer said curtly. He hadn't called the nurse in to question him; he intended to do the questioning himself.

BUT she was not so easily sidetracked. "Every one out there is terrified," she went on. "Every one wonders whom that fiend will strike down next. Hadn't the men better arm themselves and look through the woods for that maniacal monster?"

Gillian said quietly, "Miss Kaltenborn, we will shelve Mr. Stranahan for the time being. I want to find out one or two things from you. Inspector Moran is wearing a different suit from the one he had on at about supper time. Did you change his clothes?"

The nurse's eyes were suddenly opaquely black. The change was as startling as if her blood-red lips had turned, on the instant, blue.

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"I—I don't remember!" she whispered.

Gillian had not expected that chance question to fluster her so. He said quickly, "What do you mean? You're absolutely calm and composed."

"All these dreadful things happening—" Her whisper trailed off huskily into silence.

It was remarkable, Gillian reflected, how easily women sprang behind the mask of hysteria once you got them anywhere near a corner.

"I want you to think, Miss Kaltenborn."

"I'm trying to think!"

"It's very hard for me to believe that you would forget such a thing so completely."

"I think I changed his clothes, but I'm not sure. Sometimes I give him a bath about suppertime, and then put him into other clothes."

"But you don't remember whether or not you did it this evening?"

She was staring at him.

"Yes!" she cried. "Yes—I did change him from the old suit to the new one."

"After I had talked to him?"

"Shortly after that. Yes!"

"Before you took him into the conservatory?"

"Why, of course! I didn't see him from the time I took him into the conservatory until you wheeled him into the library.—Naturally! How could I?"

Gillian bent toward her.

"When did you change that dress you have on?"

"This morning!" Again that strange black opaqueness in her eyes. It gave them decidedly a hypnotic quality. There was a queer force behind them. This was remarkable, too: all her talk, her insistence, was on hypnotism!

"No," Gillian said, "you didn't change it this morning, because—"

"I beg your pardon—"

"Because," he said gently, "there was a brown rust stain on the left shoulder of the uniform you wore this afternoon. This one has no rust stain."

The nurse looked quickly at her shoulder. Then she smiled.

"I forgot. I changed my uniform before I went down to dinner."

"Before or after dinner?"

"Before, I said."

"Where is the other dress?"

"Hanging in my shower bath! You see, I spilled an antiseptic down the front of it. I'd forgotten."

"I see," Gillian said. What he saw was a remarkable coincidence. Jane changing her dress and burning the soiled one because she'd spilled brandy down the front of it; Miss Kaltenborn changing her uniform because she'd spilled an antiseptic down the front of it. Coincidence?

"I washed it out," the nurse hastened to explain. "You see, it was an antiseptic which stains if it isn't washed out immediately. It's really nothing but saponified carbolic acid, and it will injure the fabric if it isn't washed out immediately."

"I want to see that dress."

"Of course!" She sprang up. Gillian picked up the candle. She went to the door at the end of the study, opened it and went up the private stairs.

HER room adjoined that of Inspector Moran, though there was no connecting door. The bathroom door was open.

The pungent odor of the antiseptic greeted Gillian's nostrils the instant he entered her room.

"There!" she said, and there was

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a faint mocking note in her soft, whispery voice.

He held up the candelabrum. Her white uniform hung from the nickeled shower rail. The garment was still so wet that it dripped. Beside it hung a pair of white silk stockings. They, too, were wet.

Gillian glanced about the bathroom. He looked at the basin and in the tub and all about the white tiled floor for signs of blood, but he found none.

He set the candelabrum down on the basin and lifted the dripping white garment from the shower rail. It had been washed thoroughly with a faintly perfumed soap, yet this delicate perfume was scarcely perceptible through the strong odor of the antiseptic.

"Do you doubt me?" Miss Kaltenborn whispered.

That whispered question startled Gillian. A woman might have put such a question, in such a tone, to her lover. He wished, with sudden and perhaps unreasonable indignation, that she wouldn't whisper; that she would talk loudly.

She saw that he was looking up at the stockings, and whispered, "I always wash my stockings myself."

Gillian was sure that he would find, somewhere, a pair of her shoes, freshly whitened.

He examined the white dress; found the rust spot he had noticed on the left shoulder that afternoon. As he shifted the dress, he saw suddenly a glimmer of bright red in the cuff of one sleeve. Blood red! Was it a clot of blood she had overlooked, had failed to wash out?

He turned the cuff inside out. A red rose petal fluttered to the floor!

Miss Kaltenborn softly gasped. He looked at her. She was backed against the glistening white wall.

"It's a rose petal!" she whispered.

"Yes," Gillian said, and picked it up, holding it close to the candle light. It was difficult to say how fresh the rose petal was, it was so wet. But it looked fresh. He could find no indications of wilting.

Some of the nurse's composure had now deserted her. Some of the warm color had ebbed from her olive cheeks.

"When were you at the rose cottage?"

"This afternoon," she whispered.

"When?" he snapped.

"Before you and Mrs. Hazeltine arrived. Mrs. Stranahan sent for me to give her a massage. She had a splitting headache as a result of all—"

"You haven't been near there since, of course?" Gillian said dryly.

"Oh, no, no!"

SO far, Gillian reflected as he permitted Miss Kaltenborn to return downstairs before him, every person he had questioned had been evasive, had acted as if he or she were withholding valuable information. He realized that it would be a very difficult case, because of the human factors involved. That had a familiar ring. It was what he had told himself this morning, before he had decided to come to Sunrise Towers.

He wanted to talk to Vee next, but before he talked to her, he wanted to do some investigating; he wanted to look into a few wardrobes. His supposition all along had been that the murderer of Sylvia Stranahan must either have worn some protective garment, such as a slicker, or had changed to other clothes since committing the murder. Certainly, no one could have committed such a bloody murder without drenching his — or her — clothes with blood.

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Gillian began with Inspector Moran's closet; looked rapidly through the few clothes hanging there. The remaining magpie on its gilded perch made him uncomfortable. It was evidently asleep, with its head tucked under one gleaming, iridescent wing. Gillian thought of its mate, held, as if protectingly, in the hollow of the dead Sylvia's arm, its lifeless, glassy black eyes staring into her face. Gillian shivered.

Who had come into this room and taken that magpie? And what had been the murderer's purpose in killing the bird at the same time as the woman?

In spite of himself, his mind returned to the softly whispered phrases of Miss Kaltenborn: "Mr. Stranahan was interested in Oriental mysticism. He might have hypnotized every one of us."

Gillian shook himself. That was absurd. He had investigated hypnotism. There was no scientific basis whatever for a belief in group hypnotism. Yet the yogis of India . . .

"Rubbish!" the lawyer muttered, and went on to Captain Holcombe's room. But in the closet there he found neither damp clothing nor blood-spotted slicker. Quite obviously, the murderer would have more intelligence than to leave such damaging evidence hanging on a hook in a closet. But Gillian had yet to encounter a logical-minded murderer.

He investigated Raymond Libby's room, then Dick Moran's. And he went to the floor above to look into Molly Lee's room. He identified it by the portable typewriter in the closet, and by the wet black dress he found hanging over the back of a chair. That dress might have been soaked with rain, or it might have been recently washed. It was impossible to say.

He looked under the bed. There, he came upon a small steamer trunk, plastered with steamship and European hotel labels. There were no initials painted on the trunk; or if there were they were covered with stickers. The trunk was locked. He made a mental note of an intention to have that trunk opened.

GILLIAN returned to the floor below and went to Vee's room. He intended to go in; but with his hand on the knob, he found that he was incapable of going in. It was strange—yet not strange. He could not bring himself to turn the knob. And he knew that what held him back was fear—fear of what he might find in there. It had been hovering in his mind, a thought he did not even dare to voice to himself—a vague and shadowy gray phantom that he lacked the courage to face.

Gillian must have spent upwards of a full minute, with the candelabrum in one hand and the knob of Vee's door in the other, trying to muster his courage to enter her room. It was the strangest of struggles. He could not make himself turn the knob. His forehead grew wet with perspiration.

Presently he backed away from the door and returned downstairs, by the little back stairway leading to the office that had once been Mark Jordon's. He wondered if Mark Jordon had been unhappy here. His divorce, following the discovery that Jane not only did not care for him but acutely disliked him, had been shortly followed by his marriage to a Spanish opera singer, Lolita Cassandro. He had loved her before he had known Jane, and this love evidently had never been quite extinguished. Where were Mark Jordon and that lovely Spa. ish singer now?

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Gillian, shutting the stairway door behind him, placed the candelabrum on the walnut desk and opened the door into the library. He wanted to talk to Vee. He must talk to Vee now. On one point he was certain; Vee would not lie to him.

He caught a new note of excitement in the crowd. A quick inventory disclosed that Captain Holcombe was missing. Dick Moran told him that the yacht captain had taken a gun and gone out to look for Ronald Stranahan, convinced that Sylvia's husband, alive and drenched with her blood, would be found hiding out there.

"We couldn't stop him," the aviator said. "He was wild. But it was all put on!—if you want my opinion, your murderer has made his getaway!"

Gillian said wearily, "Perhaps you're right. We'll see." Then he called to his wife.

Vee was still sitting, as he had seen her the last time, staring sightlessly at Inspector Moran, her face almost as white as that of the girl lying out there on the veranda of the rose cottage.

"Red, I want to talk to you."

"Oh, yes," she said listlessly.

CHAPTER XVI.

AMNESIA.

WHEN Gillian and his wife were alone in the little office, with the door closed against intrusion, he took her in his arms and kissed her. For a few seconds she lay limply against him, with her head heavy on his shoulder. Then she lifted her head, and he felt a tremor pass through her.

Vee pushed herself away from him, and gripped the edge of the desk with one slim white hand. She was looking up at him, and her eyes in the candle light were, not green, but electrically blue.

"Darling," she whimpered, "what am I going to do?"

The lawyer stared at her. He said briskly, with a smile, in an attempt to hearten her, "You'd better sit down and come clean, Red."

Vee flew back into his arms and clung to him. She began to sob, and for a moment made no effort to control herself. Then she grew quieter. She took his handkerchief out of the breast pocket of his coat and wiped her eyes.

Looking up at him again, blinking, softly sniffling, she said, "Darling, what have I done?"

"That's what I'd like to know," her husband said. "What have you done, Red?"

"That's it," she whimpered. "Darling!—*I don't know!*"

Gillian's eyes narrowed a little. "I don't understand, Red. You know what you do, don't you?"

"But I don't know what I did tonight!"

"You mean, after dinner?"

"Yes!" she cried.

"That's easy," he said, but it was one of the hardest things he had ever had to say. "You went to your room, got into that green swimming suit—and took a swim."

"But I don't remember!" his wife wailed.

"You don't remember what?" he said sternly.

"Anything, after I opened my door to start downstairs for the swim!"

Gillian looked at her with amazement. The grayness of his face had become more noticeable. He looked haggard and very tired. The candle light carved deep hollows under his eyes.

"Sit down," he said.

Vee sat down and looked up at him,

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with her hands limp in her lap, her shoulders drooping, her whole attitude one of hopelessness and despair.

"Try to tell me just what happened."

"But I don't remember!"

"Let's go back to that damnable dinner. You were furious at Sylvia."

"I could have killed her!—And Jane, too. Maybe you didn't notice it, but she was just as nasty to me, in her way, as Sylvia was."

"FOR God's sake, don't say that! You were furious, I know you were. Afterward, you went upstairs. Just what did you do?"

"I smoked a few cigarettes. I tried to read a magazine, but I couldn't think. Then the strangest feeling came over me. It was— It was like— Oh, I don't know!"

"Try to describe it, Red."

"I don't know how. Oh, it was ghastly. Something, some queer feeling, was creeping over me.—I locked my door."

"Why?"

"I was afraid."

"Of some one's coming in?"

"Oh, no, no!—Of myself. I was afraid I might—" She stopped and pressed her fingers to her temples. It was not necessary for her to go on. Gillian could read her thoughts; at least, he could guess them.

Vee, panting, said, "It was a—a trance-like feeling."

Gillian shivered.

"It crept over me," she went on. "There was something — something trying to say something to me. I said to myself, 'This is simply ridiculous.'"

"Of course," Gillian helped her.

His wife shrugged, ran the fingers of one hand nervously through her beautiful red hair, which was tumbled down about her shoulders.

"It was horribly confusing. But this thing was saying to me . . . Gillian," she cried, "it's so frightful! It was saying to me: 'Go out there and kill that woman!' That's why I locked my door." She stopped again and looked up at her husband imploringly. "Oh, darling, you've got to help me!"

"God knows," Gillian said thickly, "it's all I want to do.—Try, honey. Keep trying."

"It kept saying that, but I tried not to listen. The wind was howling outside. I knew it was going to rain. I said to myself, 'If I could just get outdoors—do something strenuous like taking a swim!' So I got undressed—just tore my clothes off. I think I ruined that dress, the way I ripped it off. I put on my swimming suit, and went to the door. I unlocked it and started to open it."

She stopped, her mouth open, and looked at Gillian helplessly. "Darling," she said, in a tortured voice, "that's *all!* That's all I remember!"

"Don't you remember going into the hall?"

"No!"

"Down the stairs—out the door—crossing the lawn?"

"No!"

"Or passing the rose cottage?"

Vee started to scream, then clapped her hand over her mouth. "What did I do, Gillian?" she gasped.

He said steadily, "You took a swim, didn't you, Red?"

"I don't know! I don't remember anything!"

"You must have taken a swim. You came in soaking wet."

"Darling," she panted, "you know I wouldn't lie to you. If I had killed that woman—if I *knew* I'd killed her—I wouldn't lie to you! You know I wouldn't lie!"

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He groaned, "But you don't remember?"

Vee shook her head helplessly.

GILLIAN pondered. At length he said wearily, "Let me see your fingernails."

She held out her hands. He looked at the nails. They were smoothly coated with violet-pink, transparent lacquer. There were no scratches. The polish was not flaked. But he had no way of telling how recently it had been applied.

He said, "Do you remember going into Inspector Moran's room immediately after leaving here?"

"Oh!" she cried. "To strangle that magpie, you mean!—Oh, Gillian! You *do* think I killed that woman!" Her voice faded into a wail of despair and her glorious red head drooped.

Gillian was perspiring. "I'm not sure of anything," he answered. "I was sure of you; I was sure you wouldn't tangle things up any worse than they were. You're the one person in this whole crowd I counted on.—But you don't know what happened!"

"I'm sure I was hypnotized!"

Gillian made an impatient sound. "Red, that's sheer nonsense! There's no such animal."

"But every one says that Ronny Stranahan was a student of Oriental—"

"Honey, now listen.—We will grant that you went into a trance, induced perhaps by your anger since you first came here. A sort of amnesia. That's quite possible, quite logical, quite scientific. I've run into the same thing often in the courtroom. A terrific nervous strain, or a high emotion, will often blot out the memory for periods of hours. We grant that, because we've seen it.—But we don't and won't grant hypnotism. That kind of hypnotism is absolutely impossible."

"But people have been hypnotized!"

"Only with their knowledge and consent. Moreover, no person under hypnosis will perform a criminal act. That's been thoroughly established. A hypnotized person will do strange and silly things, but never criminal things."

Vee's expression was suddenly radiant with relief. "Then," she cried, "I couldn't have killed that woman!"

"That doesn't follow at all," Gillian disagreed. "You weren't in a state of hypnosis. You were in a state of amnesia."

Vee slumped again. Gillian said in his tired voice, "We'd better take a look at your room."

"What do you expect to find there?"

"I don't know."

They went up the little stairway and to Vee's room, Vee walking ahead, with terrified eyes darting about in the darkness, Gillian carrying the candelabrum.

With the door of Vee's room shut behind them, Gillian placed the candelabrum on a table and said, "Now I want you to go to the door and place your hand on the knob."

WHEN Vee had done this, he said, "Now, open the door slowly. That's far enough. What comes into your mind?—Quick!"

"Ronny Stranahan!" she gasped.

Gillian groaned again. "All right, darling. Shut it. Come over here. Sit down." He sat down beside her on the bed and put his arm around her slim waist. "You say, the first thing you remember, after leaving this room, was returning to it."

"Yes, Gillian."

"Tell me just what you remember."

"The first thing I remember is clos-

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ing that door. It was just as if I hadn't been out of the room. If my swimming suit hadn't been dripping wet, and if my hair hadn't been wet, too, I'd have sworn I hadn't even left the room. But somehow, aside from being dripping wet, I knew I'd gone for a swim."

"I don't understand."

"I don't think I can explain, Gillian. Everything was so unreal, so—so hazy, so strange. There I was, in that dripping suit. I knew I'd intended going for a swim. I assumed I'd come back from it—naturally."

"Do you remember swimming?"

Vee shook her head. "I simply knew. It isn't as if I remembered, even hazily, swimming. It was as if, when I opened that door, I walked into a dense fog that shut down on all my senses—seeing, hearing, feeling."

"What did you do when you came out of that—that trance?"

"Sat down and smoked a couple of cigarettes to pull myself together. I was shaking horribly, and horribly scared."

"Why?"

"I don't know, darling. When I'd pulled myself together, I took off the suit and threw it over the bathtub. Then I took a hot shower, followed by a cold one to steady my nerves, and smoked a couple more cigarettes. By that time my mind was fairly steady; only I felt weak—all gone. I thought I'd better go to bed, so I got into these pajamas. And just then all the lights went out! I had on these mules. I snatched up a dressing gown and hurried downstairs."

"I want to see that bathing suit."

The emerald green swimming suit was, as Vee had said, hanging over the bathtub. It was still saturated with water. Gillian wrung it out; observed that the water forced from it was not even faintly pink. If Vee had gone about it deliberately, in full possession of her faculties, she could not have hit upon a safer way of removing incriminating blood spots. Going to the rose cottage, she could have killed Sylvia Stranahan, then gone for her swim, and every spot of blood would have been washed away in the pool or under the shower when she returned to the house!

Beside the bathtub, near the suit, were the rubber swimming slippers she had worn. They were of jade green rubber with white soles. Gillian examined the soles. They were of white rubber. He found several blades of grass in the grooves of the waffle-like pattern into which the soles had been molded.

FAINTLY frowning, he turned to look up at her. Vee was no longer in the bathroom. He went back into the bedroom, and found her standing at the window, her hands on the sill. She was looking down.

Gillian heard the whining of gears outside. He hastened to the window; reached it in time to see the bright beams of head lights go arching about. He heard the crunching of spinning wheels.

"What is it?"

"Some one's leaving!"

And it was evident that this unknown person was leaving in a great hurry. The muffled roar of power came to them. The search lights seemed to leap.

"That's my roadster!" Vee announced.

"It's probably Holcombe again."

Yes, it was probably Holcombe, driving like mad—to do what? Fetch the Portersville constable? Find Ronald Stranahan? Escape? At all events,

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he was wasting no time. The powerful head lights glowed in the trees. They twisted. It was unsafe, traveling down that twisting, doubling road at such speed. What imp of urgency was riding beside the unknown driver!

The head lights played on wet tree trunks, sent scattering silver through the boughs of the pines.

And suddenly, mysteriously, there were no head lights. Nothing down there but complete blackness, made even more dense, even more formidable by the abrupt absence of the lights.

Seconds later, above the sound of the storm, there came a tremendous crash. It seemed to hang, reëchoing, in the air as if its occurrence actually spanned a dozen seconds. Yet the sound was instantaneous. A splintering impact of sound, it had hardly occurred before it was over.

"He's wrecked my car!" Vee cried. She shuddered, probably recalling her own recent smash-up.

CHAPTER XVII.

MURDER NUMBER TWO.

THE front door was open. When Gillian and his wife reached the lower floor, they saw flash lights sparkling down the drive like racing fireflies. Every one had apparently gone to investigate the sound of the crash. Every one but Inspector Moran. In the library, glowing with candle light, he sat in his wheelchair, shouting.

"What was it?" he yelled at Gillian.

"Some one wrecked my car," Vee answered.

They ran out and down the drive. It was drizzling a little, but the wind had abated somewhat. Gillian took Vee's hand and they hastened after the others.

The accident had taken place about a quarter of a mile from the house, at one of the worst turns. A silent and awe-stricken group surrounded the wrecked roadster when Gillian and his wife reached the scene. The roadster had evidently gone out of control; plunged into three small pine trees almost simultaneously, and snapped off two of them. The other was gashed half-way through. From this evidence, some estimate of the speed at which the car had been traveling could be gained.

The windshield was shattered. One wheel was off. The frame was apparently twisted, perhaps even buckled from that head-on collision. The car had caromed, somehow rebounded, and it now sat diagonally across the road.

Gillian, flicking the beam of his flash light here and there and ascertaining the extent of the damage, shouted, "Who was driving it?"

Some one said, "Holcombe."

"Where is he?"

"Here," Miss Kaltenborn's soft, whispery voice floated to him.

The yacht captain was lying in the road, no doubt where he had been thrown on the instant of impact with the pine trees. The nurse was bending over him. When Gillian went around the wreck, she was rising as if she had just placed her ear to Holcombe's heart.

Captain Holcombe was lying on his back, with one leg doubled under the other and his arms stretched out, one of them bent beneath his body. The elbow joint was undoubtedly broken.

Miss Kaltenborn looked up into the beam of Gillian's flash light.

"Broken neck," she whispered, and licked her blood-red lips.

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"Are you sure?"

"He must have died instantly."

"Oh," Gillian said, and felt a wave of coldness, of illness, pass over him; and once again his stomach became cold and heavy.

Out of the darkness Dick Moran's voice said, "Suicide!"

And Raymond Libby commented scornfully, "Rubbish! He was on the trail of something."

GILLIAN sent his light flickering from face to face. Jane Jordon was not there. He asked where she was.

"She went to her room a half hour ago," Raymond Libby answered. "She was absolutely all in. She could not stand any more of—this. I took her up to her room, and she locked herself in. She was going to take sleeping medicine."

Gillian shivering, looked at the car again. Molly Lee advanced a theory. "Mr. Hazeltine, doesn't this prove that Mr. Holcombe killed Mrs. Stranahan?" she said.

The maid had, Gillian recalled, insisted that Captain Holcombe had killed Sylvia; and he wondered now why she had been so insistent.

"It doesn't seem to me," he said, "that this proves anything."

"Don't you think he killed her, and then committed suicide?—He loved her and he lost her."

That, Gillian reflected, sounded like a line out of a cheap novel: "He loved her and he lost her."

In this latest tragic affair Miss Kaltenborn found food for her own pet theory. "He was driving along this road when he suddenly saw the face of Mr. Stranahan in the trees. It terrified him. He lost control and smashed into those trees," she said.

Gillian was convinced that Miss Kaltenborn would in a moment declare privately to him that Ronald Stranahan had actually hypnotized the captain. He felt sure that the woman would say that Sylvia's husband had caused Holcombe to drive headlong into those trees—against his will to live!

Once again, they were all talking shrilly; so many scared voices. And Gillian, half hearing, was paying little attention. He was puzzled by one decidedly mystifying circumstance. Standing at Vee's window, he had seen the lights of the car go fingering among the trees; then he had seen those lights suddenly go dark. Seconds later he had heard the splintering crash as the unseen car hit the trees. Sound, of course, travels somewhat more slowly than light. He recalled that, whereas the flash of a lightning bolt travels at the rate of some 186,000 miles per second, the sound of the thunderclap travels at only 1,100 feet per second.

Yet the roadster, when it crashed into the trees, was only a quarter of a mile from where he stood at Vee's window! He should have heard the crash approximately one second after those lights went out. But he distinctly remembered that a number of seconds—five or six at the least—had elapsed from the time the lights went out until he heard that terrific crash.

In other words, the head lights had gone out at least five seconds before the roadster crashed into the trees. Why, he wanted to know, had those lights gone out?

Gillian looked into the seat of the car. The entire windshield had been carried away, obviously, by Holcombe's body. The momentum of it, when the car was so abruptly halted, had carried him over the wheel and through the windshield. And somehow the direc-

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tion of his plunge had been diverted, so that he fell on the left side of the hood and rolled off and into the road. His head might have struck the top of the windshield frame, or it might have struck the framework of the khaki top, which was up. But Gillian could find no trace of blood at either place.

HE turned the beam of the flash light downward; held it on the rubber matting on the floor of the car—steadily, very steadily, in spite of what he saw there.

Very distinctly, beside the gearshift handle and on the rubber matting, he saw a woman's muddy footprint. It was still damp, still easily distinguishable. The sole was somewhat unusual. Faintly, but clearly enough, that print was waffle-patterned; it had been made by a rubber-soled swimming shoe on the left foot of the wearer. Unquestionably it belonged to the pair that Vee had worn when she went for that swim!

Gillian tried to open the car door, but it was jammed and would not open. He climbed over the door and seated himself behind the wheel. His distress in the presence of the dead man had given way sharply to another kind of illness.

That footprint, he reasoned, was nothing but coincidence. In her dazed and furious state, Vee had gotten into the roadster to drive away, then her fear of driving had won out over her hatred of this madhouse. That must have been it.

Sitting there, feeling sick and defeated, with the flash light beam sparkling on bits of broken glass, Gillian suddenly saw the black thread. It hung down in a loop perhaps ten inches in length from behind the instrument board.

He looked at the loop of black thread for some time before he actually saw it. It hung there, subtly provoking his attention. Then a questioning corner of his brain began to wonder what a loop of black thread was doing in such a place.

He reached down and gave the loop a tug. It did not come free. It was evidently attached to something behind the instrument board. It was strong thread, with a shiny finish, very similar to the kind used by shoemakers.

When it did not come free or break, Gillian got down on his knees and looked up into the tangle of armored wires, copper tubes and steel rods which terminated in the backs of the various instruments.

A previously meaningless pattern now sharply assumed clearness and purpose. Gillian was not mechanically-minded, but what he saw back of that instrument board might easily have been understood by any one. The cable which shielded the flexible shaft of the speedometer had been unbolted and pushed down the shaft, three or four inches. Around this shaft was wrapped several hundred turns of the black thread. Dangling from the other—the outer turn—of the thread was a glass tube, perhaps an inch in length, with metal ends—a fuse.

In the maze of cables, tubes and rods, Gillian found the little black bakelite base on which the fuses were mounted.

Through these fuses there passed the current for the ignition and the various lights. If there was a short circuit, one of these fuses would blow out. But the fuse through which ran the current for the lights was missing from its little brass prongs.

The scheme was diabolical in its simplicity and effectiveness. Captain Hol-

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combe had been murdered by that black thread!

WHEN Holcombe had started the car; rather, when the car started rolling, the speedometer shaft began, of course, to turn. And as it turned it wound up, as upon a thin, revolving spool, the length of black thread, the other end of which had been tied about the lighting fuse. There had been, of course, a great deal of slack. When this slack was taken up—wound about the spinning speedometer shaft—the strong, taut thread had literally snatched the fuse out of its prongs. The head lights had instantly gone out!

It was as deliberate as though the person who had done this had shot Captain Holcombe through the heart! Some one who knew his temperament, who knew that he would go driving madly down this twisting road, had tied one end of that thread to the speedometer shaft, and the other end to the fuse, knowing that if the head lights went off at any place along this dangerous, winding road, the driver would be killed or seriously injured.

Or was that the explanation? Another pointed to a cold-bloodedness that Gillian could hardly credit. It meant assuming that the person who had tied the black thread from fuse to speedometer shaft had done it merely to prevent any one from leaving Sunrise Towers, to go—for what? The police?

Was Gillian himself the intended victim? He had driven the car to Sunrise Towers; and now he remembered having let drop some casual explanation of Vee's unwillingness to drive, while at the dinner table. Jane had known that fact before he came.

Was Holcombe an innocent victim, or a target?

Only one fact had been clearly established; despite Molly Lee's theory, Captain Holcombe was innocent of Sylvia's murder.

The purpose behind this trap was evasive, hard to grasp.

It was now impossible, except by foot or airplane, to reach the outside world. This road was the only exit for automobiles. The telephone line had been cut.

Gillian called Vee. She came to the car, from the other side, white-faced and trembling. He pointed to the footprint.

"Why!" she wailed. "It's mine!"

"When did you do it?"

"I haven't the faintest idea!—Gillian! I must have stepped into the car when I went—for that swim."

He showed her the simple device by which the car's lights had been suddenly cut off. She was amazed.

"But I don't know anything about such things!"

No one, he might have said, needed to know much about mechanics to rig up that simple, effective device. But he did not say it, because the others were also peering in now. He explained the black thread and the fuse to them all.

Dick Moran said coolly, "It's a pretty good gag."

Raymond Libby said, in his gritty voice, "It's the work of a fiend!"

Molly Lee exclaimed, "What strikes me is the absolute cold-bloodedness of it!"

Lore Kaltenborn whispered, "I still say Ronald Stranahan is at the bottom of all this!"

Vee said nothing, but Gillian heard her teeth chattering. He wondered what Jane would say.

"What has become of that Indo-Chinese?"

No one knew. Mytho Jolor had vanished.

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Gillian said to Vee as they started for the house, "I want you to go to your room, lock the door, and stay there."

"Yes, darling.—I'm afraid. Won't you wait till morning to finish this investigation?"

Gillian would have preferred to wait until morning. But he, too, was afraid. And more than half sick. He must return now to the rose cottage and go over that grisly scene inch by inch. He had only one hope, one intention: to disprove a horrifying theory.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Far Eastern Hotels and Accommodations

IN the large cities of the Orient and the South Sea Islands, there are European and American hotels, but in the smaller towns and out of the way places the traveler is forced to stay in the native hotels which differ greatly from ours. Upon entering a Japanese hotel, one is immediately taken to a room and the register is brought to sign later. There are no chairs or beds in the room. The guest sits on the floor, or cushions are provided if asked for. When one wishes to retire, the bedding is brought and laid out on the floor. It is taken away when the guest gets up. Night clothes are also provided. Hotel baths are public in the last sense of the word, several guests bathing in the tub at the same time. However, one does not wash in the tub, but washes one's body with soap and water before entering it and simply gets into the tub to warm one's self. One must furnish his own towels and soap.

In Manila, when you enter a student house and ask for a room you get just that, for there is nothing in it. The guest is required to furnish his own bed and linens and whatever furniture he wishes. Showers are the only baths and there is no hot water. Three meals a day are furnished with this type of lodging. In the villages in the outlying provinces of the Philippines, the only bath is an outdoor fountain located on one of the street corners.

In Pago Pago, Samoan Islands, there are no hotels of any kind. The traveler is invited to live with the native residents or build his own thatched hut. In India and Burma it is customary to carry your own bedding: mattress, sheets, pillows, spread, and since in some parts it is quite cold at night, a blanket also. On trains you not only carry your bedding, but unless you have your own servant you also make up the berth.

In Tibet, hotels are unnecessary. The traveling stranger is welcomed at any house he may choose. The natives of this country consider it good luck for a stranger to honor them by asking for lodging. And they also believe that he might put a curse upon them should they refuse him. During the traveler's stay, the husband of the house leaves. The traveler hangs his hat on the outside wall next to the door, and when the husband sees that the hat is gone he returns. Not only is the traveler given a place to sleep and all he can eat, but his every need is taken care of. One can readily see the impossibility of trying to run a hotel on a paying basis in such a country as Tibet.

Jay Carter.

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Helgvor of the Blue River

By J. H. ROSNY AINÉ with GEORGES SURDEZ

Helgvor, about to lead his primitive clansmen to battle, did not know that the woman he had chosen as mate was surrounded by cannibals

Both Heigoun and Kzahm staggered from the impact

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

PRESSING forward to battle, a little band of Ougmars come within striking distance of the enemy—marauding Tzoh warriors who have raided the Ougmar camp and kidnaped the women of the clan.

Akroun, chief of the Ougmars, is directing the battle plans, but he is having difficulty controlling two of his young warriors: Heigoun, the boastful strong man of the tribe, and Helgvor, clear eyed, straight limbed hunter who is not impressed by Heigoun's strength or his boasting.

The enmity between the two has been caused by Heigoun's challenge. Helgvor, in tracking down the Tzoh raiders, had come upon Glava, a Tzoh woman who was fleeing her cruel tribesmen. Helgvor, after helping her to escape, took her to his own tribe, where he announced that she was to become his mate. Heigoun desires her, and the two men have agreed that they will do battle for her after the pursuit of the Tzohs is ended.

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Glava, who has accompanied the Ougmars on their march, to show them the way to the Tzoh country, fears the unwelcome attentions of Heigoun and escapes during the night. A greater peril faces her now, however. In a forest she has been surrounded by a savage tribe of black-faced Gwahs, eaters of human flesh. She is about to be captured.

Helgvor, ignorant of her fate, has gone ahead of the main body of Ougmars, to act as scout and to draw the enemy into ambush. Heigoun remains with the main body of warriors.

CHAPTER XVII.

BATTLE OF THE CLANS.

FIRST, Helgvor and his two fellow scouts had to ascertain the strength of the enemy and report to the chief. Only toward evening, Akroun having prepared the ambush, should Helgvor lure the Tzohs to their doom.

The Tzohs had changed their route since the preceding night, striking westward, probably in the hope of finding the river again. On the terrain covered in the last few days, the flood had caused no damage. It was seldom that the ravines had been found flooded.

Helgvor, with his wolf and his dog, followed the trail as easily as if the foe had been in sight. The tracks were so clear that they had to proceed with care. Luckily, there were few thickets, and the grass was rather short.

At noon they came to a range of hills rising from the plain. As they climbed the slopes, Helgvor and Akr found many traces, and when they reached the crest, the scouts saw the enemy's band and the women. The sight of the women and the girls maddened Houam, for the Men of the Rocks had taken away his mate and his young sisters. Hatred stirred Akr, although his wife was among those who had already been rescued by Helgvor. Because he had lived through a like adventure before, Helgvor remained calm, although his heart beat harder.

"We must go downhill by the ravine," he suggested. "Then circle the pools." Casting a glance at the sky to ascertain the time, Helgvor added: "Will Houam go back to our people and warn them?"

As agreed, the scouts had left clear traces of their march, and Akroun could have had no trouble following them.

"Houam will warn the warriors."

While Houam went back to the northwest, Helgvor and Akr passed through the ravine and circled the pools. Skilled at hiding themselves, nothing betrayed them. And the Tzohs walked without fear, confident because of their numbers. They marched slowly. The flood had reached this section and made the trip difficult. Many were obviously tired, not a few wounded. Moreover, the women had to be spared too great fatigue.

Through the grass, behind hillocks, bushes and trees, Helgvor and Akr followed the hostile horde. The Tzohs halted before the sun grew red with approaching twilight. They had chosen a formidable position in which to camp. Protected by pools and bowlders, it could be reached only through a gap in the rocks, easily fortified, easily defended. Pines and firs supplied wood for the fires.

"The Tzohs are mighty!" Akr said, doubtfully.

"The Ougmars shall not attack their camp!" Helgvor replied. He laughed low, and resumed: "They would be

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dangerous to attack with club and spear, with hatchets. Dangerous also against spears. For one would have to risk their weapons in return. But, with his bow, Helgvor can harm them without coming within their range."

He indicated his bow, and Akr, knowing his reputation, grinned. The Tzohs were still gathering wood, and a few came toward the bush behind which the two Ougmars had taken shelter. Although it was improbable that they would come this far, Helgvor and Akr retreated to the tall grass. The dog and the wolf, now accustomed to hunting man, imitated them without need of speech.

THE sun was setting in an enormous blaze of red against the west when Houam returned.

"The Ougmars are in the ravine," he said.

He related that Akroun had chosen a spot pitted with caves. But Helgvor went back to the main body. He addressed the chief.

"This place is too far to lure the Tzohs."

"Let Helgvor guide us."

And the Son of Shtra led the Ougmars into a thicket within a thousand cubits of the Tzohs' camp. The sun had vanished and light was dwindling on the plain.

"We must wait for moonlight," the chief said. "What does Helgvor wish now?"

"Another bow and many arrows."

Behind the fires of the Tzohs, glowing brighter as the twilight darkened, the swarthy faces of the warriors could be seen clearly. The women also could be discerned, and many of them appeared resigned to their lot.

Helgvor selected a second bow, that of a warrior with mighty arms, a weapon on which few men could use well. Arrows were brought. Helgvor tested the bow, adjusted its tension. Then, patient as animals in ambush, the warriors waited in the shadow. The sky was overcast, and they saw neither the great blue star, the Northern Cross, nor the red star. Many closed their eyes and drifted into a light sleep. Then the moon appeared at the edge of the plain, dipped its distorted disk into pools, while millions of frogs croaked like old men.

"The Son of Shtra must prepare to go," Akroun said.

The orb, at first much like a red cloud, condensed and became like the polished blade of a hatchet; its light turned the plain into a limitless, silvery lake.

Already, followed by Akr, Helgvor crawled through the grass. When they had gone five hundred paces, Akr hid, and permitted the Son of Shtra to go on alone. The Tzohs were dropping off to sleep. A few sentries squatted near the entrance. Before so many warriors skilled in the use of hatchet and all weapons, what could be done by a lion, a tiger, or a gray bear? Spears alone would have riddled them. The Tzohs felt secure.

Suddenly, the only presence they would fear manifested itself: A tall man was standing in the grass!

At the first alarm, Kzahm, Son of the Boar, stood. The warriors, startled from sleep, were puzzled and bellowed questions. And the resounding voice of Helgvor defied them.

"The Ougmars come to punish the skunks!"

Clubs whirled, spears were darted. Helgvor, with a savage laugh, took his bow and aimed. The arrow pierced the neck of a Tzoh. The outcry died out and deep surprise immobilized the Men

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of the Rocks; no Tzoh bow could have sent an arrow that distance. Advancing a few steps, Helgvor shot again; the arrow stabbed between the ribs of another man.

Upon an order from Kzahm, the warriors fell headlong to the ground. The third arrow missed, the fourth dug into a shoulder. Thus, Helgvor made the camp unsafe.

Seeing but a single warrior, Kzahm grew ashamed and ordered a pursuit. Not too trustful, nevertheless, he dispatched but fifteen warriors against that odd adversary. Feeling that delay was dangerous, the warriors rushed headlong. Helgvor waited for them to come halfway, his bow hummed three times. The first arrow pierced a belly, the second knocked out an eye, the third missed. Several of the Tzohs returned his shots, and an arrow scratched his thigh, but the Ougmar ran, and increased the distance separating him from his pursuers.

The appearance of Akr worried the Tzohs and slowed them a while. He fired an arrow, missed, and pretended to flee, while Helgvor stood still. Five men headed for Akr, eight sought to surround Helgvor, who avoided them with ease.

Scattered in a semi-circle, fierce and desperate, for the fugitive's speed left them small hope, they kept on stubbornly. Then Helgvor raced to the right and, with a blow of his club, killed an isolated warrior. Then his arrows hummed again, and he faced the remaining five.

"The Tzohs are not even hyenas!" he derided them. "The Tzohs can't fight any one but old men and women!"

Some distance away, Akr had reached the ambush. Twenty Ougmars leaped out, terrifying the Tzohs, who were killed off almost without offering resistance, while Helgvor dropped two more of his foes.

NOW, Kzahm was aware that the night of life or death had come. The Ougmars, the Gwahs and the dogs howled all together. Because they had appeared suddenly where they were not expected, they seemed the more formidable. Memories were stirred in the skulls of the veterans, the legends woven around the Ougmars. But the battle must be fought; the Ougmars were coming. Around them were scattered the fierce dogs and the Gwahs with pointed ears.

Furious puzzlement quivered in the Black Boar's breast. He thought of rushing out to meet his enemies, but the numbers of the Tzohs and those of the Ougmars were now almost equal, and moreover there were those black men, those dogs with the terrifying bark. From the elders, Kzahm had heard of the Men of the River, knew their strength to be great, their agility extreme. He alone, he thought, was more formidable than any Ougmar. He decided to wait for the attack and had fresh branches piled across the gateway. The warriors could take shelter behind the heap of wood and bush.

But Akroun called a halt, to inspect the Tzohs' camp. He saw that the storming would be hard to push through, and would cost many lives.

"It is wood that fire loves to eat," Helgvor said, coming near.

"Helgvor is as sly as he is valiant," Akroun smiled.

He ordered that dry branches and twigs be gathered, then, torches in hand, the Ougmars went forward once more. Arrived close to the camp, they tossed the flaming bundles into the barrier. Smoke lifted.

Kzahm had guessed his foes' plan

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quickly. To avoid the spread of flames over the entire camp, he ordered the barrier fired, and the two blazes clashed. On both sides, men waited until nothing but ashes remained. As the Ougmars had to cross a narrow spot or wade in the pools, Kzahm decided to stand his ground and wait for them.

"The Men of the Blue River seek to die!" he clamored to cheer his followers. "They shall die!"

The Ougmars replied with their war cry, but still Akroun delayed an onrush. He preferred to order his best bowmen, Helgvor principally, to harass the enemy with arrows. This tactic could not fail. When several Tzohs had dropped, Kzahm realized that his wait meant disaster, and ordered an offensive movement.

It was like a mass of bodies, of hatchets, stakes, clubs and spears. Fearing panic, Akroun opposed onslaught with onslaught. The mass of the Ougmars dashed forward, while the Gwahs hovered on the flanks, pelting the Tzohs with sharp stones.

THE two hordes collided; young and strong men left life. Heigoun, Kzahm, Helgvor, with the more muscular of the fighters, struck with clubs, broke bones. Others, armed with stakes, aimed for the body, disemboweled their antagonists. Many used the spear, striking for the soft places. While the spring of the Tzohs appeared to triumph at first, the Ougmars soon were masters.

Heigoun and Kzahm came face to face. Their bulks were alike. Both had the deep chest of the bear, monstrous shoulders and legs like oak branches. Their clubs clashed like rock on rock, and the impact was so terrific that both staggered back.

Astonished, each now aware of the strength of his enemy, they hesitated, eyed each other, and planned clever strokes. Rasher, Heigoun resumed the fight, and his swinging club would have crushed Kzahm's skull had not the other parried. The Black Boar swung on the flank, mightily. But an Ougmar warrior shoved the club aside, hitting Kzahm on the shoulder. Heigoun got home two blows immediately, one to the other shoulder, the other on the neck.

Kzahm fell to the ground and Heigoun shattered his ribs and his limbs.

The defeat of their chief discouraged the Tzohs; only a few kept on fighting. The mass suddenly became as does under the claws of the leopards, like stags before the tiger, and perished without combat, struck down by the hatchets, the clubs and the heavy stakes.

Akroun looked down upon the corpses and the bodies of those not yet dead. The women had come to greet their men, who dripped with fresh gore.

"The Ougmars are mighty; the Ougmars have annihilated their enemies!" the chief proclaimed, tossing a spear into the air. All the warriors acknowledged his worth. His reputation would last a long time, for the hero of the day was much too young to command.

"Akroun is a great chief!" Shtra declared solemnly.

"Helgvor is a great warrior!" the chief replied.

Heigoun, somber, sullen, eyed Helgvor steadily.

The clan was taking the women back to the Red Peninsula, but Helgvor, with Iouk and Akr, sought Glava's tracks.

The left bank having proved fruit-

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less, Helgvor had thought of the right shore and the islands, particularly of the tiny islets on which animals were scarce. Akr explored ardently, for he loved to seek for trails above all things, loved to direct the dog. Days passed without result, until one morning when Akr picked up a spear with a broken head. Poorly chipped, the stone point was not the work of Ougmar or Tzoh, while the Gwahs used only stakes and stones.

Later, a second indice was found, on an island; Helgvor, Iouk and Akr found ashes, a squirrel skin, the shell of a tortoise blackened with smoke.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SACRIFICE TO THE RED MOON.

GLAVA waited with her limbs stiff with horror. Terrorized, the little jackal had fled. There were pauses, absolute silence, then crawlings, creepings, heavy breathing. Stake in hand, ready to fight, Glava was moved by the instinct of hunted beasts, and felt in advance the anguish of death.

The attack was brutal as the leap of the leopard, sly as the onslaught of wolves. The Gwahs, springing together in a somber, moving mass, overpowered their victim. The only blow she contrived to deliver dropped a Gwah, but ten arms were around her like black reptiles, and collective strength vanquished individual vigor. Blows with sharp stones dazed her. Lianas were wound around her limbs.

"The Gwahs are the masters of the daughter of the Blue River!" Ouak clamored.

Because his ruses had succeeded, his authority increased. All the others thought merely of drinking warm blood, of eating flesh, but Ouak was sensitive to the mysterious allure of the tall, flexible maid, whose light complexion made her so startling among the black masks surrounding her.

"The foreign woman must be killed!" one of the men said.

"The Gwahs shall kill her," Ouak agreed, "but she shall be offered in sacrifice to the Red Moon!"

This was the most important of the rites performed according to ancestral traditions by the Men of the Night. The flesh of beings sacrificed to the Red Moon had particular virtues, and the mention of the sacrifice recalled evenings of absolute happiness. Even the greediest accepted the delay, and Ouak had gained time to think of some way to be alone with the captive.

"The Daughter of the River shall perish beneath the Pointed Rock!" he added.

Then, four Gwahs carried Glava through the forest. She closed her eyes, unable to look at these men without frightened disgust. Perhaps she would have suffered less under the claws of the gray bear or the tiger. Racial instinct made the Gwahs more odious than Old Man Urm, than Kzahm with the bison's head, than even that gigantic Ougmar from whom she had fled. She felt the end approaching.

They passed between trees older than one hundred human generations; grass died in their shade, in their clefts, large as caves, dwelt wild beasts. The trees grew scarcer, the soil was hard and red. Then they came to a pointed rock, in a cluster of black pines.

Gwahs, men, women and children, emerged as if from the ground, howling hideously, clawing toward the prisoner. Glava thought her life was finished. The hot blood of youth re-

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volted against destruction. Amhao seemed to float in the sky, together with the tall Ougmar warrior who had saved her, the memory of whom made the Gwahs appear more ugly, more sordid.

THE women, ardent as she-wolves, were for putting the captive to death at once.

"Ouak has heard the voice of the Red Moon," the chief said, to quiet them.

The women accepted this explanation, but watched over the girl with blood-thirsting jealousy. In vain Ouak used all his ruses; he discovered no reason for being alone with the prisoner. In any case, as this was a ritual question, his prestige availed nothing against the opinion of the old men, in whose heads were kept alive the obscure legends.

A stag was captured alive, and joy increased. It would be sacrificed at the same time as the foreign woman. And the time drew near when the Red Moon would swing into the sky.

Two men unfastened the lianas binding Glava. Five others came, armed with sharp stakes, and the girl knew she was to die. An old Gwah started a ritual chant, monotonous as the dripping of rain on stones.

"The Gwahs were born of the Night and the Red Moon yields them strength! The Gwahs are the masters of the forest, and those who walk on all fours fear the stakes and the sharp stones! When strangers come into the forest, the strangers must perish, and the Gwahs must drink their blood! The Gwahs were born of the Night and the Red Moon grants them strength!"

The men brandished their stakes, the women yelped horribly, and all repeated in chorus: "The strangers must perish, and the Gwahs must drink their blood!"

Then the old man indicated Glava, and resumed his chant:

"That woman is a stranger. She shall perish!"

The stakes menaced the Daughter of the Rocks.

There was a great silence; the Red Moon was about to be born anew. A pale light filtered among the western stars, a cloud was illuminated, and suddenly the Red Moon lifted her disk above the horizon.

The old man chanted: "Red Moon, Red Moon, who made a pact with our ancestors, here is the stranger! Her blood shall flow before thee, and thou shalt hear her cry of agony!"

He lifted both arms to give the signal, and his eyes dimmed with terror. Somber silhouettes had leaped from a clump of bushes, came on, numerous as the ants from a heap. Bellowing like bison, impetuous, they attacked.

They were the Upper Gwahs, whose legs were longer than those of the Lower Tribes, whose hair was spotted as the pelt of the panther, but whose skins were also porous and sweaty. Their thick lips were drawn back on sharp teeth. Often, a generation would pass on without their appearance, but their hatred was eternal.

WOMEN fled, the males turned their stakes against the invaders, and the battle started, at the end of which the living would eat the dead. Alone beneath the Pointed Rock, Glava was paralyzed by surprise for a moment, then, understanding that her death had been delayed by fate, she sought cover.

Near by ran Gwah women, so frightened that they did not recognize

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the stranger. But when they reached the shadows of the old trees, two of them instinctively leaped upon the Daughter of the Rocks.

She dropped the first one with a blow and, grasping the other by the hair, dragged her to the ground. Bewildered, the others allowed the prisoner to escape, and soon she was a long distance ahead, out of their reach. She no longer felt fatigue nor pain. Drunk with the joy of living, she crossed an immense stretch, and only stopped when tired out.

The stars twinkled through the leaves, branches palpitated in the wind. She flung her arms wide and dropped to the soil. She slept there, at the mercy of prowling animals.

When she awoke, the patient moon had reached the zenith. A night-bird flew away like an enormous, dark butterfly. Near by, animals grazed, and Glava, sitting up, saw herself surrounded with monstrous shapes. The nearest one was as bulky as seven aurochs, resembled a bowlder covered with reddish moss. The block of the head ended in a long snake, twisting between white horns, large as the horns of ten bison, which were tusks. Four cylinders thick as tree-trunks supported chest and belly.

Glava recognized the mammoth. For thousands of years such beasts had not inhabited the Land of the Tzohs, and in the territories of Ougmars and Gwahs they grew rarer as the centuries passed. The Daughter of the Rocks had first seen mammoths during her flight with Amhao. This one, standing in the moonlight, formed an imperishable image in the eyes of the fugitive.

Dull fear seized her; she looked at the other mammoths, under the low branches, with the light of the moon drenching their backs, and because they were so like the first, her amazement did not increase. But the impression made by this giant stirred her to active fear.

Glava knew that she was in the center of immense forces, any one of which could crush her as she could crush a lizard. The formidable beasts were asleep, and she could hear the rhythm of their breathing. They feared nothing in the murderous forest, neither tiger, lion, gray bear, nor poorly armed Gwahs, and were endangered only when faced by the rhinoceros who occasionally clashed with them, and tried to pierce their bellies with his spike. But the mammoth oftener than not crushed him beneath his tremendous weight. And those encounters were so rare that generations of mammoths knew nothing of them.

For several thousand centuries the ancestors of the mammoths had lived in a dreamy peace. Now the time had come when, upon a warmer earth, their number dwindled. Those who were to exist for a long time were far north, on plains where water became stone as early as autumn.

The future did not exist for them; peaceful innocence filled their hearts. But the summers were becoming too hot for them, and on very long days, when the sun consumed half the night, they plunged their hairy bulks into the river, into lakes, into pools, to refresh themselves. They felt better during the cool autumn months.

DAWN broke, dimmer than moonlight, then day came, with its bird songs and colored clouds. Glava was no longer afraid. While she had slept, exhausted, still as death, one of the mammoths had investigated her. As she did not move, the instinct of the animal supposed that she lacked

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that life which troubles other lives. And he readily granted her the small stretch of soil she occupied.

When the animals awoke, her scent was familiar. All that recurs without bringing annoyance or danger becomes indifferent or loved by the living. The mammoths accepted Glava as they would have accepted a tree or a stag.

She also felt, although differently, the security of repetition. When the mammoths strode away, to seek better pasture, she followed them, because she feared the Gwahs, keeping nearest the one who knew her best. The others, as time passed, grew accustomed to her presence. And a whole day elapsed. She found nuts, roots and mushrooms which fed her, while they ate bark, tender stems, grasses or the tufts of aquatic plants.

On the second day, she circulated in the herd as if she had been with the mammoths for several seasons. Her scent was so well known that they forgot her. In all things they proved themselves better than men; none were inclined to kill her or to cause her suffering. They roamed at random through the forest and the marshes. The world entered through their tiny eyes, the hue of sod, and they had an intelligence special to them, which permitted them to know what was harmful and what was good.

Glava lived more at ease while with them than she had among the Tzohs, where the weak were sacrificed, or among the Ougmars, where she had met Heigoun. She was sad, however, for she needed Amhao, and although she did not know it, she missed the tall, tawny warrior.

Perhaps she could have become friendlier with the mammoths, by digging up roots for them or selecting tender twigs for offerings. But their bulk frightened her, and that strange hairy snake swinging between the immense tusks, their enormous legs which might crush her with ease. She kept her distance, and if they did not threaten her, they made no effort to know her better.

They marched uphill through the forest, farther from the river each day, so that she soon realized she would have to leave them. This was a hard decision to make, for she feared the Gwahs, the Red Moon, the evening fires, death.

Nevertheless, she allowed them to go off without her one morning. The thickets screened them. Alone, she felt rising in her the horror of meat-eaters, and she hid a long while under branches. The numberless sounds, which she had not heeded when with the mammoths, resumed their ferocious significance. The shadows held lurking monsters. Armed with a clumsy stake and sharp stones, she traveled in this land of claws, of teeth and venoms, all her senses keyed for a brief future.

As after her flight from the Ougmar camp, she found herself lacking fire. The flints she found produced small sparks, but she could not set flame to grass. She encountered the wolf, the hyena, the brown bear, the panther. None attacked her. But she saw no lion, no tiger, no gray bear, beasts that retreat before none save the mammoth, the rhinoceros—or fire.

At last she reached the river and knew her way.

She walked and walked. At night, she sought shelter. And fate spared her.

At the end of a day, after seeking long, she selected a flat space on a steep rock, five arms' lengths above the ground. The stars were out, she was tired, and she trusted herself

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to the night. Wolves, hyenas, jackals, passed by, ascertained that they could not reach her, went their way. Glava would awake, watch for awhile, fall asleep again.

Toward morning a terrible life halted near the bowlder. In the weak light seeping out of the east, by the lingering glow of the stars, the shape recalled that of the tiger. But it was a large, handsome lioness, full grown and very strong. Her light-colored pelt, her eyes with round pupils, were enough to distinguish her from the striped feline, the eyes of which are oval. But the manner was the same, that patient watchfulness, in a huddling crouch.

As her scent was poor, chance had caused her to stop near. A gust of wind had brought the smell of Glava to her nostrils. Having eaten the women and children of the Gwahs, she knew human odors. Of late, her hunts had not been successful. Accumulated hungers twisted her belly. And there was a prey upon the bowlder which would sate her craving.

But the needed leap worried her. If the prey fought, she would be in a bad position, and she recalled a blow from a sharp stick, flush on the nose, delivered by one of the women she had caught. With raging impatience, certain that the erect creature could not flee, she watched.

Finally, trying to surprise Glava, she stood up against the side of the bowlder. Glava had watched her without showing herself. And she saw no lane of escape. When the lioness leaped, Glava would die. She saw the beast prowl about the bowlder, smell the wind. Occasionally she heard heavy breathing or a low dull roar. Immobility was her defense. But when the lioness reared her body against the rock immobility became dangerous, and standing in her turn, the girl spoke in a strident voice:

"The stake of Glava is sharp, it shall sink in the lioness's jaws! Sharp stones will put out her eyes!"

The animal, astonished, retreated as if to think the situation over. Glava had but one hope, that another life might pass, easier to catch. No life passed by, and the lioness sprang. The point of the stake broke off on her hard skull, and, one hip ripped open by a clawing stroke, Glava rolled helplessly from the flat surface down to the plain. She was helpless, closed her eyes, and waited for the lioness to devour her.

A shadowy form appeared near the bowlder.

The feline, turning, beheld an immense and hideous beast. A horn jutted from its nose, another was planted in the middle of the ungainly head. Its skin was like the bark of very old trees, its eyes were tiny and stupid. Survivor of a formidable breed which had vanished almost altogether, evil-tempered and ferocious, the beast had probably been awakened by the noise of the struggle and had come to investigate.

The ancestors of the lioness, recognizing a rhinoceros, would have fled without hesitation.

But she was surprised, excited by the conquest of copious flesh, hesitated a moment, then it was too late. The enormous mass charged headlong. The lioness clawed at random, bit, but the rhinoceros, invulnerable, had but to pass. She was stretched out, ribs smashed in, entrails showing, moaning with pain. The huge animal turned, trampled her, scattered her bones, her flesh, her hide. Then, his rage vented, he trotted away, forgetting the other being.

Glava had crawled behind the bowlder. Her blood spurted. Her head

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was light, her eyes no longer saw, she fainted.

CHAPTER XIX.

REUNION.

WHEN she came to, a man was staring at her.

"Helgvor!"

He had come out of the limitless solitude. And despite her pain, despite her weakness, she knew the unfathomable happiness of not being alone. Two other men were near by. When with the Ougmars she had learned that Iouk was a quiet man, and she guessed that Akr, slight, almost frail, would obey the others. For a time she took joy in not being alone, and a great tenderness went from her toward Helgvor.

Then she asked: "Amhao?"

"We'll find Amhao!" he said.

She trusted her destiny to the tall nomad, and sank into fever, fatigue—and faith.

The wound was deep and the fall had harmed the bones. Glava suffered, bravely. In the mystery of instinct, she felt that Helgvor was more tender than she had ever been. Her astonishment was limitless, that such gentleness was not a weakness; for was he not as brave as a tiger, as clever as a wolf, as skilled as the most feared warrior?

No other man resembled him; he was alone; he seemed to spring from an unknown race. Her horror of men who break off women's teeth, who beat them, or throw them in sacrifice to the Hidden Lives, did not extend to him.

And Glava was revealed to Helgvor. She was the eternal and ever changing morning. For her, he would slay Heigoun. The fear of losing her was so violent that he would feel his heart grow cold at the thought.

As he watched by the fire, Heigoun's silhouette rose in the flames; Helgvor believed ardently in his own victory, but in a livid glow he sometimes felt himself crushed by the club, disemboweled by a hatchet. The cry that then died on his lips did not express fear, nor rage, but the supreme shame of not having known how to guard the Daughter of the Rocks.

They traveled in the canoe by day, stopped at night. Glava was delirious for a time, then youth won out. And they whiled the time exchanging the legends of their tribes. After twelve days she was well, out of danger. And that night, when Akr and Iouk were asleep, Helgvor spoke to Glava.

"In a few days the canoe will reach the Red Peninsula."

A shudder rippled on Glava's flesh, as the poplars quiver before the wind. She recalled the colossal warrior with the cruel eyes: Heigoun.

"Glava cannot live on the Red Peninsula," she cried.

At the sound of her voice Akr stirred restlessly in his sleep and the wolf growled. A sharp pang lashed Helgvor's heart.

"Where can Glava go? The Men of the Rocks would kill her, and women cannot live alone on the plain or in the forest."

"Amhao and Glava lived thus!"

"Was not Glava stretched helpless upon the ground? Even jackals could have devoured her. And was not Amhao's canoe pursued by the Tzohs on the river?"

"The chief will give me to the giant warrior," she said, trembling. "Glava prefers the tiger's fangs."

"Helgvor killed twenty times as many foes as Heigoun," the nomad said proudly. "If Heigoun wants Glava, Heigoun shall die."

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She lifted her head with a surge of faith and admiration.

"Helgvor is braver than the snow-eagle!"

"Helgvor will not allow any man to touch Glava," he said excitedly. "For her he would fight the chief of chiefs and the whole tribe!"

Feeling that she would not be merely Helgvor's slave, Glava felt an intense tenderness.

THE moon was full when the canoe neared the Red Peninsula.

It was toward twilight that Iouk and Helgvor first saw the dark trees and the reeds faded by autumn. Since the preceding night they had been on the alert for Heigoun and his men. Helgvor decided not to take Glava to the tribe as yet, but concealed her in the bushes. He addressed Akr, more subtle than Iouk.

"Akr shall go and see if the Tzoh woman, sister of Glava, is on the Peninsula. He shall also find out if Heigoun is hunting. Akr shall not allow himself to be seen."

Akr left, light and swift as a stag. When he returned, the sun was rising over the forest.

"Akr walked among the Ougmars," he reported. "He was not seen! The Tzoh woman is on the Peninsula."

"Akr has seen Heigoun?"

"Heigoun is not there."

"Helgvor then shall go to see the chief," the nomad said, after a moment's thought. "Akr and Iouk will watch over Glava?"

"They'll watch!" Iouk assured him.

Glava listened, fearful. She did not wish Helgvor to leave her, but she knew his aim, and kept quiet.

"Let Glava fear nothing!" Helgvor said. "Before the sun reaches the black hills, Helgvor shall return."

Helgvor reached the Peninsula, and the warriors who saw him shouted loudly. Other men, women, ran forward, then came Akroun. He considered Helgvor with fretful elation.

"Helgvor came back! Where are his companions?"

"Iouk and Akr are waiting away from here."

"Why did they not come with Helgvor?"

"They shall come," he answered, lifting his voice to be heard above the cheers of the warriors.

"And the foreign girl?"

"Helgvor saved the Daughters of the Rocks," the tall nomad replied, his face set.

"He also saved our women," the chief said, gently. "The Men of the River have not forgotten. What does Helgvor wish?"

"That no one shall be master of the foreign women without his consent."

"So be it," the chief promised gravely.

"And if Heigoun protests?"

"The warriors will obey the chief of chiefs."

AKROUN'S sway was firm. No Ougmar now dared to question his judgment. But he distrusted the obscure twists of destiny, and he wished Heigoun to disappear.

"Helgvor always liked to obey Akroun, always shall obey him. But Heigoun will not obey. He will roam near the chief, roam near the Daughter of the Rocks. Let the chief allow Helgvor to fight."

Akroun was perturbed. Should Heigoun win, all would fear him.

"The tribe needs strong men!" he said at last. "If Heigoun gives up the foreign woman, Helgvor must not fight him."

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"Heigoun will not yield her."

"Then," the chief said after a long pause, "the combat is inevitable."

"It will be so," Shtra put in. "Heigoun will attack Helgvor!"

The spectators were silent. Almost all dreaded the defeat of their hero. Because Heigoun was escorted by ten men, Akroun gave ten men to Shtra to avoid a surprise, but he concluded:

"Ougmars must not fight Ougmars. Only Helgvor and Heigoun may fight!"

"Thus shall it be," Shtra agreed. "And if Helgvor wins, Shtra shall give him Glava for a mate!"

"The foreign woman shall be Helgvor's mate!"

Then Helgvor asked for Amhao, and added: "If Helgvor is vanquished, the foreign women shall not be slaves. They shall be permitted to go free."

The chief and the warriors having given their consent, Helgvor sought Amhao. She had lived somberly, for no Ougmar woman had befriended her. At the sight of the young man she trembled and wept. At first, poignant joy dominated her, then she feared the death of Glava, and she wept.

"Glava lives," he said. "Come."

She understood, cried out loudly. Then, submissive, filled with unutterable affection for her savior, she picked up her child and followed Helgvor.

"The Son of Shtra returns," Akr said. "He is not alone."

Glava heard the light rustling of the bushes and, suddenly seeing Amhao, boundless joy dilated her chest and she threw herself upon her sister.

"There!" Helgvor said. "Amhao and Glava shall follow Helgvor, and when Helgvor has found Heigoun they shall remain by the river bank, ready to flee in the canoe."

Glava then feared Helgvor's defeat, and no longer desired the combat. But she knew that the clash was unavoidable as the darkness which follows twilight.

CHAPTER XX.

FOR GLAVA!

THE endless world was the same, yet constantly died. The river rolled waters which were not the same waters, light succeeded light, and it was never the same light, night followed day, and it was ever another darkness, the beasts roamed the plains, and they were other beasts than the numberless beasts vanished into eternity.

Heigoun, Son of the Great Wolf, roamed, furious, beneath the sky. He had the brutal temper of the boar, the ferocity of the flesh-eaters and a merciless pride. His ambition had been born one day, when Akroun, thrown far by the horns of an aurochs, had nearly died. While the chief of chiefs, in his hut, healed slowly, Heigoun dominated the others. His deception was bitter when Akroun lived. The Son of the Wolf scorned Akroun, whose hair was dusted with the spray of old age.

After the kidnaping of the women, seeing his followers increase in numbers and influence, he had condemned Akroun in his own mind. But his men had been too few and too timid. Helgvor had defied him and dared to claim the stranger. Moreover, the exploits of Shtra's son had caused those of Heigoun to be forgotten.

Thinking of such things, rage shook the warrior; jealousy burned his entrails, he wished to annihilate Helgvor with invincible stubbornness. Finding neither Helgvor nor Glava on the Red

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Peninsula, he had started out to seek them. His hope was to meet them either on the river bank or on the stream, for he thought they would follow that path.

And one morning he halted in a cove. Five men followed him, who would become minor chieftains the day he won over Akroun. All scanned the river, and saw nothing but floating trees, grasses, twigs, leaves, carried away by the current. Heigoun wondered whether Helgvor had not reached the Peninsula since his departure. And as he mused, a voice hailed him, and he turned, astounded at what he saw.

Helgvor had come.

He stood on a hillock, armed with a solid stake and one of the bronze hatchets taken from the defeated Tzohs, bow hung over one shoulder.

The giant replied to his call with a shout loud as the roar of a lion. His five followers advanced carefully, wishing to surround the young warrior, but Shtra appeared with the men given him by Akroun, and Hiolg, the boy, who had contrived to accompany them.

"Why does the son of jackals come here?" Heigoun asked.

"Helgvor wants to live in peace within his hut."

"Heigoun wants the foreign woman!"

"Did Heigoun find her? Did he make an alliance with her?"

"Before Heigoun, Helgvor is like the stag before the lion! Heigoun shall become chief of chiefs, and all the Ougmars will bow before him."

"Helgvor will never bow to Heigoun, nor obey Heigoun."

"Did Heigoun go and dare the Tzohs within their camp?" Shtra, irritated, spoke in turn. "Did he bring back twenty women? Did he kill fifteen warriors? Helgvor shall be a great chief."

HEIGOUN brandished his stake, but when he saw Helgvor grasp the bow, he hid in the bushes. His men imitated him and an arrow hummed close to Helgvor's head. Then Helgvor, Shtra and their men took shelter in the thicket. Silence weighed on land and waters; beasts no longer saw the erect beings. Then the voice of Helgvor rose.

"Does Heigoun want peace or war?"

"Heigoun wants Helgvor to submit or die!"

"It is well! Helgvor and Heigoun shall fight."

Then Helgvor took his bow in hand. He had six arrows, but Shtra and his warriors gave him twenty more. Before shooting, the young man warned:

"Helgvor is ready to fight!"

There was no reply, and the first arrow whistled. It shot through the leaves, near Heigoun, who laughed scornfully. At the fourth arrow, a roar of fury burst out, and the colossus appeared. Blood dripped from his ear, and his face was twisting; he rushed like a wounded leopard.

The twigs of the bush made the use of the bow awkward, and Helgvor was eager to fight. He showed himself, shot an arrow at random, for he was hurried, then his fire-hardened stake met the stake of the giant. The sense of fatality, submission to Destiny, held the other warriors aside.

The stakes clashed as Heigoun sprang upon Helgvor at top speed, but the young man avoided the lunge, leaping aside. He thrust out in his turn, and his point struck the giant's club, hung from the shoulder.

"Heigoun is heavy as an aurochs!

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Shall Helgvor have to kill him with arrows?"

It seemed that the Son of Shtra was about to use the bow again, but the desire to clash hand to hand with his rival proved strong enough to make him retrace his steps.

Heigoun lunged for the belly; the weapon slid on the ribs, ripped off a strip of skin. Already Helgvor, pushing with all his might, had driven his stake into his foe's breast. Heigoun reeled and grasped his club. Because his stake was blunted, Helgvor changed it for the bronze hatchet.

Formidable despite his wound, Heigoun whirled his club, but, carried away by his spring, he missed Helgvor. As he rushed by, the bronze hatchet split his skull. He fell, the hatchet dropped hard twice more, and death came. For a moment longer the immense body palpitated, then Heigoun was still forever.

"Helgvor is the mightiest of the Men of the River!" Shtra proclaimed in a resounding voice.

And the shrill voice of the boy, Hiolg, repeated:

"Helgvor is mightiest of men!"

GLAVA and Amhao had waited, ready for flight, in the canoe hidden among the reeds. At intervals the girl was swept by cold shivers, she chattered as if winter had come suddenly into the sky. Her confidence died and was reborn. She saw Helgvor beaten constantly, saw him triumph constantly. Neither image effaced the other completely. She listened tensely, but the distance was too great, and she heard nothing save the monotonous voice of the flowing waters, the rustling of insects, and when she looked at Amhao, identical terror showed in their eyes.

Steps were heard. Unbearable impatience drove Glava from the canoe upon the plain. The universe spun, Glava uttered a wild cry and sank to her knees. Helgvor, her beloved, had come back.

She extended her arms, while her face dripped with tears.

"The hatchet dropped the Son of the Wolf," Shtra said.

Helgvor held the girl against his chest, and with her, he seemed to embrace the river, the forests and the plains, all space and all time. She was weak from a happiness composed of the tests she had survived, of the death from which Helgvor had saved her, weak also from the immense faith she had in his strength.

Then Shtra said, according to traditions:

"The Daughter of the Rocks shall live in Helgvor's hut. She shall be obedient, and he shall kill those who covet her."

THE END.

THE RADIO WAR

Armed with weapons modern science has not yet dreamed of, the forces of the Soviet East swoop down on the Americans of the future! An unusual science-fiction novel starting week after next.

By Ralph Milne Farley

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MEN of DARING
By STOOKIE ALLEN
"ROMANCE NEVER DIED WHILE DAVIS WAS ALIVE."
BORN IN PHILADELPHIA IN 1864 OF PARENTS WHO WERE BOTH WRITERS, DAVIS SEEMED TO HAVE INHERITED A GREAT ABILITY FOR WRITING. AT COLLEGE HE HAD A VERY TEMPESTUOUS CAREER BECAUSE HE WAS FOREVER TAKING UP FOR THE UNDER DOG. ON FINISHING SCHOOL HE RETURNED TO PHILADELPHIA AND BECAME A REPORTER.
RICHARD HARDING DAVIS
FIRST ATTRACTED NOTICE BY HIS VIVID DESCRIPTIONS OF THE JOHNSTOWN FLOOD.... .. LATER, DISGUISED AS A CROOK HE MIXED WITH GANGSTERS IN PHILADELPHIA AND PREVENTED A ROBBERY. HIS NEWSPAPER STORIES CONTAINED EVIDENCE THAT LANDED THE CROOKS IN PRISON!
HE CAME TO NEW YORK IN 1890 AND WENT TO WORK ON THE N.Y. SUN. WITHIN 2 YEARS HE WAS CONSIDERED THE BEST REPORTER AND SHORT STORY WRITER IN N.Y. BECAME EDITOR OF A PROMINENT MAGAZINE AND WAS GIVEN PART OF EACH YEAR TO TRAVEL AND WRITE HIS EXPERIENCES. ONE OF HIS FIRST ADVENTURES WAS HELPING THE TEXAS RANGERS CAPTURE SEVERAL FAMOUS MEXICAN BANDITS ON THE TEXAS BORDER. THE MOST FAMOUS OF THESE WAS GARZA, THE LEADING REVOLUTIONIST OF HIS DAY.

This feature appears in ARGOSY every week

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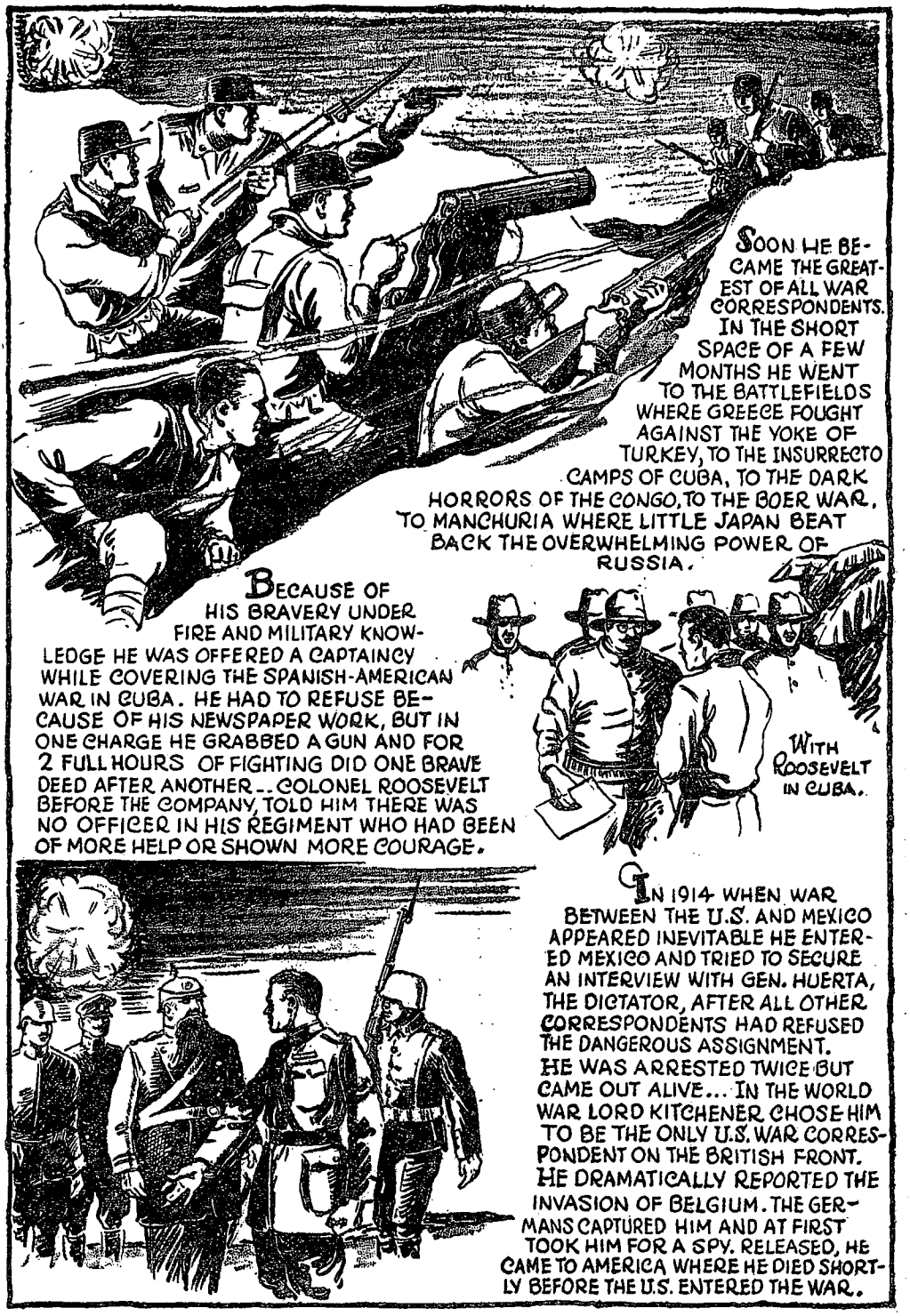

SOON HE BECAME THE GREATEST OF ALL WAR CORRESPONDENTS. IN THE SHORT SPACE OF A FEW MONTHS HE WENT TO THE BATTLEFIELDS WHERE GREECE FOUGHT AGAINST THE YOKE OF TURKEY, TO THE INSURRECTO CAMPS OF CUBA, TO THE DARK HORRORS OF THE CONGO, TO THE BOER WAR, TO MANCHURIA WHERE LITTLE JAPAN BEAT BACK THE OVERWHELMING POWER OF RUSSIA.

BECAUSE OF HIS BRAVERY UNDER FIRE AND MILITARY KNOWLEDGE HE WAS OFFERED A CAPTAINCY WHILE COVERING THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR IN CUBA. HE HAD TO REFUSE BECAUSE OF HIS NEWSPAPER WORK, BUT IN ONE CHARGE HE GRABBED A GUN AND FOR 2 FULL HOURS OF FIGHTING DID ONE BRAVE DEED AFTER ANOTHER -- COLONEL ROOSEVELT BEFORE THE COMPANY, TOLD HIM THERE WAS NO OFFICER IN HIS REGIMENT WHO HAD BEEN OF MORE HELP OR SHOWN MORE COURAGE.

WITH ROOSEVELT IN CUBA.

IN 1914 WHEN WAR BETWEEN THE U.S. AND MEXICO APPEARED INEVITABLE HE ENTERED MEXICO AND TRIED TO SECURE AN INTERVIEW WITH GEN. HUERTA, THE DICTATOR, AFTER ALL OTHER CORRESPONDENTS HAD REFUSED THE DANGEROUS ASSIGNMENT. HE WAS ARRESTED TWICE BUT CAME OUT ALIVE... IN THE WORLD WAR LORD KITCHENER CHOSE HIM TO BE THE ONLY U.S. WAR CORRESPONDENT ON THE BRITISH FRONT. HE DRAMATICALLY REPORTED THE INVASION OF BELGIUM. THE GERMANS CAPTURED HIM AND AT FIRST TOOK HIM FOR A SPY. RELEASED, HE CAME TO AMERICA WHERE HE DIED SHORTLY BEFORE THE U.S. ENTERED THE WAR.

Next Week: Kit Carson, True Son of the Old West

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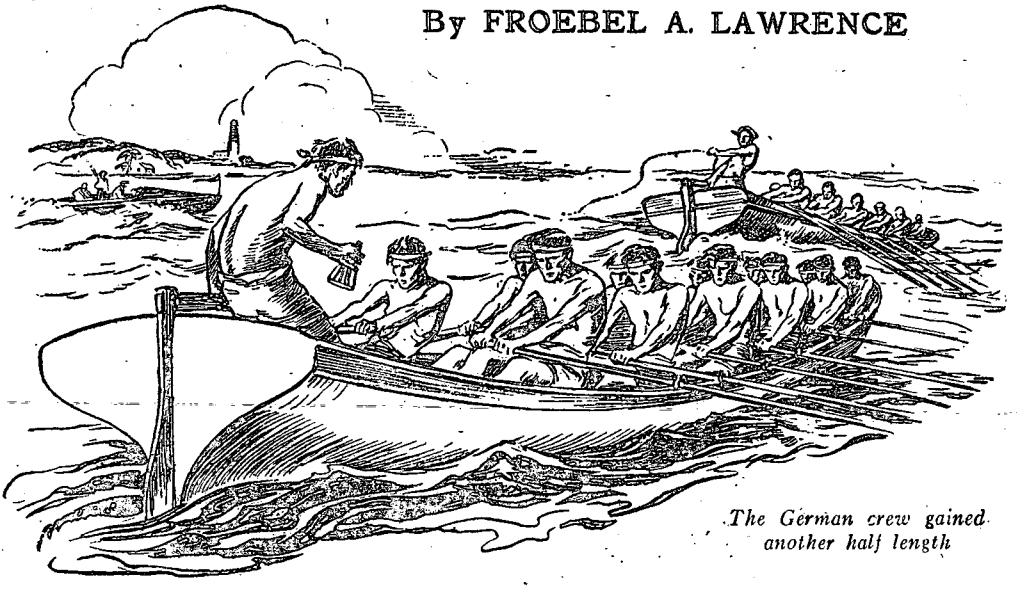
Six-for-Five

By FROEBEL A. LAWRENCE



The German crew gained another half length

Red Walker knew his trick turn might lose the race for his crew—but there was a reason why he had to risk it

THE ever-present mist from the cloud-topped mountains behind the city, swept down green Nuuanu Valley and disappeared in the mellow sunshine that drenched the shimmering blue harbor of Honolulu.

A 'Frisco-bound Matson liner crept slowly through the glassy waters, as though loath to leave the pleasant island of hula dancers and ukeleles. *Lei*-bedecked passengers turned regretfully from her rail as the Royal Hawaiian Band on the pierhead finished playing "Aloha." Kanaka diving boys raced for shore, their brown cheeks bulging with coins tossed from the ship.

At the foot of Alakea Street, where the U. S. submarine tender Active was moored, a group of dungaree-clad sailors watched the homeward bound steamer. Some of them turned back to their boat, sighing with homesickness.

Across the dock from the Active lay the interned German gunboat Rügen, chased into port by the Japanese at the outbreak of the World War. A cursing boatswain's mate was putting the crew through their morning setting-up exercises. Their hands and toes rested on the rough planking, and their faces streamed with the effort of the "leaning rest."

"*Ein-zwei! Ein-zwei! Ein-zwei!*" Rigid backs and bulging biceps strained at the count of the red-faced drill master. Over and over, he put them through the difficult exercise, until it seemed that the men must drop. There was no pity in his face. He seemed to be waiting for one of his charges to falter.

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With a last look at the departing ship, the Americans turned their attention to the scene across the dock. They laughed at the precise, exaggeratedly wooden manner in which the Germans performed all drills, and this was a good side-show. Some of the submarine men burlesqued the bullying Prussian method, and from time to time the German petty officer glared at the snickering gobs.

Suddenly there was a commotion across the dock. The Americans stopped their horse-play. They gathered together in a knot, and grunts of disapproval could be heard.

"Look at the way that stuffed sausage treats his men," exclaimed Red Walker, torpedoman first class. His freckled fists knotted at his sides. Red was a tall, skinny individual with fiery hair, blue Irish eyes, and a temper as inflammable as his top-knot—a temper that was at the moment flirting with expression.

"Well, what of it?" growled Porky Martin. "That's old stuff with him. Why get het up about it?"

Porky's name fitted not only his squat, fat figure, but also his lazy, easy-going ways. Easy-going, until trouble started—usually through some hot-headedness on Red's part—and then his puggy nose would pucker, and he'd bounce around like a rubber ball, doing more damage than one would expect from one of his unathletic build. He always backed his red-headed partner to the limit, right or wrong, and against any odds.

"Look at him kick that kid," grumbled Red. "For a nickel, Mex, I'd slam that bozo."

"Forget it! Pipe down!" warned Porky. "'Member what the Old Man said when you licked that Kanaka cop, last week? He'll yank bars and buzzard off your arm, pronto, the next time you're on report. What're yuh doin'? Biddin' for a seaman's watch mark?"

"Guess you're right," mumbled Red. He scowled over at the Germans. "That kraut gives me a pain, though."

"Same here," agreed Porky. "But it's none of our business. Let's get busy and fix up the boat for the race." He started to move away. "Those Heinies pull a mean oar, don't forget that. How much yuh bettin'?"

"A month's pay, and all I got on the books," answered Red, his eyes still on the scene across the dock. "About a hundred and fifty bucks, and I guess I'll borrow some more. Know any one with plenty of jack to spare?"

"Nobody but that damned six-for-five man, Stein, and he won't lend me a Chinese clacker. I still owe him six dollars for that five-spot I wrangled before last pay-day. I've hocked my watch and civvies already, and with that and the forty smackers in the paymaster's safe, I'm layin' seventy." Porky rubbed a fat jowl. "Helluva note! Wish I had more."

"How about starting a crap game?" said Red, hopefully. "I still got a coupla bucks, and I feel lucky to-day."

"Out! Every flatfoot has sold his shirt to bet on this race. They wouldn't shoot if yuh gave 'em the dough to start with."

RED, who had started down the dock with Porky, suddenly stopped. Quick anger flamed in his blue eyes. A young German seaman was standing woodenly at attention, hands plastered to the seams of his rough working trousers, while the petty officer kicked him again and again. The young chap's face was chalk white, but he never moved a muscle.

"Hey, Gartner," yelled Red, "cut

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that stuff out, you Dutch pretzel! Nix. Pick on somebody your own size."

The petty officer deliberately kicked again as Red shouted. Then, abruptly, he dismissed the men and clumped across the dock. He planted himself menacingly in front of the angry torpedoman. His huge hands rested on his wide hips. His feet were spread wide apart, supporting bowed legs and barrel-like body in a half crouch.

"Vot der hell do you mean, *dummkopf?*" His eyes were mere slits through which gleamed a mean, angry, menacing light.

"Listen, fella! You know what I mean." Red's slim body trembled. "Why don't you pick on a man, you bully? I don't suppose you got the guts, though, to do that." His fists came up in an attitude of defense.

"Careful Red. 'Member the Old Man."

He paid not the slightest attention to Porky's warning. In fact, he squared off in front of the big German.

"*Gott verdam!* I vill you to pieces break, *Amerikanischer schweinhund.*" Gartner bared angry teeth.

"Horsecollar! You and who else? Boy-kicker!"

The German petty officer let loose a full-lunged bellow and lunged. Red ducked and danced away, laughing. Sailors from both the American and the German ships came running up.

"Write a letter, you big bum!" chided Red. "You swing like a gate." He stepped in quickly. "Take a sample of that—and that—and that." Three times he rocked the boatswain's head before he could get his fists up.

Gartner bellowed and shook his close-cropped head. He lumbered stolidly in for more of the same, his beefy fists swinging like sledge-hammers. He uttered wild Teutonic curses, and tried for close quarters, but Red was too smart for him. He knew that a single blow from one of the German's pile driver fists would end the fight right there. He jabbed, wasp-like, at the wide red face.

They fought in a circle formed by the combined crews of the gunboat and the submarine. Each combatant had his rooters. Porky Martin bounced up and down, taunting those who rooted for Gartner until the fight threatened to turn into a free-for-all. Insults were hurled back and forth between the crews, and they were getting more personal and cutting each minute.

Red and Gartner were both beginning to show signs of wear. The German's face was badly cut, and blood dripped from his lips as they opened to emit more angry curses. Red had taken a glancing blow over one eye. A big lump marked the spot. The spectators were mixing wild cheers with their wrangling.

THEN, all at once, the howling mob became quiet. The fighters dropped their hands and instantly froze to attention as the American flotilla commander stepped calmly into the ring.

Commander Joseph Morgan was a smooth-shaven, slender little man, with twinkling blue eyes. He was never known to be in a hurry, or excited. He was liked by his men, who knew him to be fair and just regarding offenders against navy regulations. He could close his eyes to minor infractions, and rarely dealt out brig sentences or court-martials.

A mere scalding tongue-lashing in his soft, velvety Southern accent usually brought the culprit around to the commander's way of thinking. The enlisted men would face anything in

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preference to a lecture by the man they called Velvet Joe.

"Walker, report to me on the Active," said the officer, in tones of plush. "You others—clear the dock, and carry on." Without another word, he turned on his heel and strolled aboard the submarine tender.

With a rueful grin at his shipmates, Red followed the commander aboard and to his office. He stood, nervously at attention, until Velvet Joe democratically advised him to sit down. For a full minute the officer looked the torpedoman over.

"Why can't you stay out of trouble, Walker? You're always fighting. First it's aboard ship—then the police—and now the Germans.—Expect me to close my eyes to such things? First thing I know, the captain of the Rügen will be over here with a protest. I'll be compelled to break you."

Red nodded his head, but his eyes never left Velvet Joe's face.

"If you *must* fight, Walker, keep out of sight. Understand? Unofficially, mind you, I don't care if you do beat up that big bos'n's mate, but there are too many German sympathizers in this city to take any chances on a holler going in to Washington on account of fighting between these two crews. Relations between the U. S. and Germany are strained enough as it is, so I'm not taking any chances of getting it in the neck. War's coming soon enough."

"I understand, sir," said Red respectfully. "I'll try not have any more trouble with 'em, but to-day— Well, I just had to take a crack at . . ."

"Never mind explaining," purred Velvet Joe, picking a gold ravelling from one of his stripes. "I saw it start." Then his head came up with a start. "Walker," he said, "who gave you authority to accept their challenge to a boat race?"

RED'S face flushed till all the freckles were wiped out. "I—well—I—you see Vel—Commander . . ."

"Crazy idea! The Germans have been out in their cutters twice a day for the past two years. Not a man in our personnel in any kind of training.—Foolish!" Velvet Joe absently shuffled some papers on his desk. "Suppose I'll have to back you up, though, or else we'll get ourselves laughed off the map. Probably will in the end, anyway. Walker!" His voice lost some of its softness. "Walker, sometimes you give me an awful pain."

"Sorry, sir, but I really couldn't back water off the Heinies, could I, sir? I thought you'd approve when I accepted. We got plenty good men here that used to pull in the battle wagon race boats, and they're game to try. Them Germans are all muscle-bound, commander. Why, we can beat 'em if we train on cigarettes. Anyway, we got a whole week to get ready. If we don't beat 'em, you can bust me to an apprentice seaman." Red's voice rose enthusiastically.

"And that's just what I intend to do." It was the softest kind of a purr. "Now get out. I'm busy. You're coxswain of that race; it's up to you. Don't let me even hear of you again, unless you win. That's all."

Red saluted. With a serious face he turned away and stepped out into the passageway. Porky was there waiting for him.

"Hey, kid! What'd he say? Did he bust yuh?" Porky wore a troubled look on his moon-like map.

"Not yet," answered Red, soberly.

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"But we gotta win that race or else I'll be holy-stonin' decks and scrubbin' paint work. That's a promise.—And you know, Joe."

"Aw, bilge! We're gonna win that race hands down," said Porky confidently. "And lissen.—I just heard the paymaster tellin' one of the other officers that the Old Man had five hundred berries on the crew.—'Magine that? We gotta win." Porky hitched up his bell-bottomed dungarees, cocked his white hat determinedly over one eye, and started off with a deep-sea roll. "I'm gonna get some more kale, if I have tuh hock my skivvies."

RED got his crew of picked men together and hoisted the race boat to the dock for a thorough overhauling. The U. S. Navy regulation twelve-oared cutter had been loaned to the submarine crew by the Pearl Harbor Navy Yard, and it came in for such treatment as is seldom accorded boats of its class. The inside paint was burned out, and a new, thin coat of white applied. The exterior received the same treatment, but only as far as the loaded waterline. From there to the keel several coats of clear shellac were rubbed and polished with pumice stone until the bottom was as smooth as a cake of ice. The hot sun quickly dried the moisture into the planking, decreasing the weight considerably.

Every piece of loose equipment was weighed. The oars were carefully scraped and sandpapered till they fitted the hands of each man to his entire satisfaction. Then, every night after dark, Red Walker took his crew for a secret spin. Sometimes he had a hard time thwarting the spies that the sporting townspeople set to clock him. Money was being posted in big gobs by all the clubs and business houses. Every saloon was a book. And the president of one large banking concern (with a German name) put up fifteen thousand dollars on the Rügen crew. He was taking the short end, too. A lot of people seemed to place their confidence in the extended training of the German oarsmen.

Red went methodically about his work of whipping his men into shape; and they improved rapidly, working like a well-oiled machine and gradually increasing their speed and endurance as they hardened and gained confidence under Red's coaxing. Spirit ran high, and there was much small betting.

Stein, the Active's self-appointed money lender, was besieged by the enlisted men. From the lowliest coal passer to the chief petty officers who were willing and eager to pay his usurious rates of six-for-five, they borrowed money from him. He was like an avaricious pawnbroker. His countenance was wreathed in greedy smiles. He even loaned Porky Martin forty-five dollars. After confidential talks with Red, the men were betting their heads off. The thought of losing never entered their minds.

THE night before the race, Red went ashore for the first time in days. There he had an argument with his girl.

Did the funny old boat race mean more to him than she did? Why hadn't he been ashore even one night in the past week? She sniffled something about not liking the idea of his neglecting her, and he left in a brilliant pyrotechnic display of red-headed temper and good old navy cussing.

He dropped into The Two Jacks and took on a couple of glasses of con-

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solation beer. Then he walked slowly through the moonlit streets. Majestic royal palms rustled their fronds into the salt-spiced breeze over his worried head.

Arriving at the deserted Alakea Street dock, he sat down in the shadows of a pile of *koa* wood. While trying to figure out why all women are *that* way, he looked out to sea, where the Japanese fishermen were burning their ruddy flares on the bows of their gaily painted sampans. He listened to the surf breaking on the reef across the harbor, and then another sound forced itself on his consciousness. Stringed instruments, throbbing *hula* dance music, made his feet restless. He imagined the graceful, dark-skinned, *lei*-draped dancers, their luminous eyes aflame as they switched their grass skirts to the beat of the haunting, enticing melody. The swaying, flushed spectators would be beating time with their hands, and gray-haired, half naked men would be thumping huge, seed-filled gourds. He could almost hear their peculiar weird hissing to the accompaniment of the whispering gourd rattles. The audience, sitting cross-legged on the mat covered floor, would join in.

The tempo became faster, wilder, and he knew that the bare-footed orchestra was beginning to feel that last drink of palm tree gin. Excited, approving cries came to his ears, and he pictured the scene at the *luau*. From the hole in the ground which had been filled with red hot stones they would be bringing out the roast dog. They would tear off the wrapping of palm leaves and partake of the savory dish. And there would be roast pork and raw fish.

There would be a pasty *poi*, made from the *taro* root, and they would be scooping it out of a wooden bowl with their fingers. He wondered if it was thick *poi*, or thin *poi*—two- or three-fingered *poi*. They would be eating luscious guava, pappiea and roast plantain. He picked up a piece of the wood against which he was leaning, and in his mind traced it through the steps it would take before it became a ukelele in the hands of some faraway college student.

His dreaming was interrupted by a soft splash, and a smothered guttural exclamation from under the dock. He tensed as he heard some one moving and whispering. Creeping to the big stringer along the edge of the dock, he peered over, cautiously. He saw a white form slip silently into the water and swim out to the racing cutter, anchored bow and stern in the middle of the slip. His jaw squared, and he choked back a curse. That was his cutter. What the hell was any one doing around it—especially at this hour of the night?

A second later a light heaving line snaked out from underneath the dock and fell across the stern-sheets of the boat. The swimmer disappeared under the water several times, resting between dives, with a hand on the cutter's gun'nal. Then, once when he came up, he pulled something from beneath the dock by the heaving line. Once more he dived, and then he paddled back with the coiled line and climbed onto a string-piece.

Incoherent whispering came to Red's ears. What in hell was going on here, anyway? But for once he let judgment rule his curiosity, and lay perfectly still beside the big stringer. He didn't have to wait long. Soon he saw two figures come up over the dock edge. He froze, praying that his white suit wouldn't give his hiding place

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away. He recognized one of the men as Gartner by the silhouette of his cropped head, and the fact that he made his way directly across the dock to where the Rügen lay. The other man, vaguely familiar but too much in the shadow to be recognized, made his hurried, sneaking way aboard the Active.

When everything was quiet again on the pierhead, Red stripped off his clothes. Lowering himself down a pile brace, he swam quietly out to the anchored cutter. He dove repeatedly, and at last climbed back up the barnacle-covered piling. Then he slipped into his clothes again, and made his whistling way to the tender's gangway.

He greeted the quartermaster of the watch cordially. Red Walker was happy. He had a right to be. Hadn't he done a good night's work in the past half hour?

THE next morning he and Porky had a conference. Then they called the entire crew together and went into a huddle, and at last Red called on Velvet Joe. The hour before breakfast was a pretty busy one for Red Walker. He ate with the members of the crew, and just as he finished, the man who had been almost the sole topic of the whispered table conversation showed his greedy, grinning face.

"Hello, Red," greeted the six-for-five man.

"Morning, Stein. How's the old kid?" returned Walker affably.

Stein beamed. He wasn't used to such greetings. He rubbed his hands together.

"Boys," he said, addressing the gathered crew, "I got some good news for you." He seated himself and drew out a paper and pencil. "I got a lot of money here to bet. German money—to bet on the Rügen crew."

Quick looks passed between the American oarsmen. Stein saw it and held out his hands, palms up. "There you go. Right away you think something crooked."

"How come you got Rügen money to place?" asked Red.

"Account I speak German, some of them asked me if I could get their money covered.—Now, how much each one of you want?" His pencil was poised confidently over the paper. "Go ahead," he invited. "How much? I will loan you the money—on the usual terms. It won't be necessary for me to hand you the actual cash; just tell me how much you want to bet. When you win, you can pay me back; but if you don't win, of course I'll hold your chits for the amount. You can pay it back as you get paid."

"Put me down for fifty," said Porky, expecting to be cut to twenty-five. But he hadn't figured right. "A hundred if you want, Martin," agreed Stein. "All right—a century, then." Porky winked at Red.

"A hundred for me, too," barked Horse Murnane, the big Irish starboard stroke.

"Two hundred!" grunted Stormy Davis, with his usual brevity. The big half-breed Sioux, one of the best oarsmen of the Pacific Fleet, signed his name on the chit, while Stein hungrily licked his lips.

"Two hundred, here."

"Put me down for a couple of centuries, too."

"Raise mine a hundred," cried Porky.

And so it went. Stein busily noted the amounts and filed away his chits as they were signed. He seemed to have no end of money.

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He turned to Red. "And now, how about you, Walker?"

"You must be handling plenty of Rügen dough," baited Red.

"Enough to make my commissions worth while," smirked Stein.

"I guess I better go up town and place mine," sighed Red. "I like to see the jack when I make a bet."

"You think I haven't got it?" Stein's ratty eyes squinted almost shut.

"I haven't seen any yet."

"Neither have I," countered the six-for-five man. "All finger bets, but I'll collect on the chits if you lose."

"Well, I bet cash." Red drew out his money belt and counted out two thousand dollars in shiny twenty-dollar gold pieces.

The crew gasped. Stein almost choked. He ran a claw-like hand through the gold, and his eyes sparkled.

"Cash against cash," said Red: "And Velvet Joe holds the stakes."

For just a second Stein hesitated. The crew closed up around him. He forced a smile.

"That's a big bet," he said.

"Well, it isn't your money. You said you have plenty of the German dough.—Cover it." Red's stiff forefinger stuck out from his freckle-covered fist as he pointed to the gold pieces.

Stein pulled out a belt and started counting out soiled bills. His hands shook.

They turned the money over to the commander, and Velvet Joe grinned, widely.

"The ship's pool has grown fast the last hour," he informed Red. "There's a little over twelve thousand up and covered.—A banker took it."

"We'll win it." Red Walker's big mouth split into a white-toothed smile.

"You'd better. I never forget a promise," said the commander from his knees, in front of the safe.

ALL Honolulu was gathered on the waterfront that afternoon. They discussed the race in a dozen different languages and dialects. Pidgin English, that universal medium of conversation in the South Seas, seemed to be a long favorite with the polyglot crowd.

Stolid Chinese merchants sing-songed among themselves. Some were dressed in European garments, but they talked the same as those in baggy native trousers and tightly buttoned jackets. Dapper Japanese argued through hissing teeth. Filipinos from the sugar plantations wandered around with their shirt tails flapping in the breeze. Their red-slippered women, with flaring *piña* cloth waists and tight skirts, followed along, cramming themselves with sticky popcorn.

The bright kimonos of the little Japanese women added color to the scene as they daintily twirled their brilliant paper parasols over their carefully coiffed heads. They tripped mincingly in their clogs and sandals, and some of them waved tiny lacquered fans. Tremendously fat Hawaiian *wahinis* in flowing Mother Hubbards sold *leis*, wreaths and souvenirs to the jabbering mob. And here and there were young and beautiful *hapahauli* misses, sometimes chaperoned by white fathers and dusky Hawaiian mothers. They strolled with obvious dignity; proud of their Caucasian blood.

The grandstand on the Alakea Street pier, where the race would start and end, was filled with a smartly dressed crowd of Army and Navy officers, their wives and families. Prominent business men and the officers from the Rügen helped swell the select crowd.

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The music of the Royal Hawaiian Band drifted out over the bay, and the "Heave, I dive" boys larked in the water, reaping a rich harvest of nickels, dimes and quarters.

Navy speed boats kept the gaily decorated yachts, Japanese fishing sampans and other small craft clear of the course, which ran from the pier straight out to the "farewell" buoy at the harbor entrance, a mile and a half away.

Suddenly, a shout went up. The two boats pulled out to the starting line.

Both crews wore only swimming trunks, above which their naked torsos glistened in the sun. The Rügen oarsmen were heavy, muscular, with pink skins and close-cropped hair. They looked twice as large as the lean, rangy and sunburned Americans. Porky was the only man in the U. S. boat who looked as though he might be carrying extra weight; though a second glance would have revealed to one that those rolls on his ribs were muscle, not fat.

RED gave a low-voiced order, and his crew tied their white sweat bands around their foreheads. From his place at the tiller of the German boat, Gartner scowled over at Red's fiery topknot. He said something in German, and his crew laughed uproariously. Walker stuck his thumb to his nose and waggled it at the other boat. Velvet Joe shouted a warning from the pier head, but not before a shriek of merriment rose from the grandstand.

Red spoke to his two strokes, Stormy and Horse. "Watch me close now, you two. I got this pace figured out. Hold it as I direct."

"We get yuh," said Horse.

"Uh," grunted the copper-skinned half breed.

"We'll pull *easy* till we round the buoy—then we'll give her hell—just holding enough back for the spurt at the finish. Okay?" Red grabbed a firm hold on his tiller. "Stand by—give way easy.—Way 'nuff!"

The two cutters glided to the starting line under directions from the starter's launch, near-by.

Red poised himself on his toes—like a runner at his mark. His blue eyes swept the tense crew, their strong backs bent, ready to drop their oars into the water at the starter's gun. Then he turned his face to the launch and waited. On the crowded waterfront the people became silent. Every eye was on the two boats.

The starter's gun barked its staccato signal.

"Go!" Red's cry mingled with the echo of the pistol shot. He lunged forward, thrusting his hand out, palm toward the crew, as though to shove them off the thwarts.

"*Jetzt!*" Gartner spat the word into the faces of his crew, and the two boats were off, with the judges' launch close behind.

The American cutter jumped under three fast strokes that made the water boil. Then they settled down to a long, swinging gait. The crowd yelled, and the men laid back on their bending oars, their straining muscles rippling under smooth, healthy skins.

Red swayed his body back and forth, and the men timed their strokes with the movement. The hand that held the tiller was like a bar of iron, and his sharp eyes never left the distant turning point.

Half way to the buoy, the Germans had gained a boat length. The grinning Gartner waved a length of rope at Red, and let it trail astern—an invitation to take on a tow. Walker's time didn't

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change one fraction, but his lips tightened at the insult.

"Steady, boys! Steady!"

Porky grinned and got a fierce scowl for an answer.

Pulling a fast, choppy stroke, the Rügen crew gained another half length. They swung wide, and were almost around the marker when Red tensed. Now was the time! Make or break! It was a gamble, but what the hell? He kept straight ahead. His port oars grazed the buoy.

Sharp orders rapped out over the water. He balanced himself like a tight wire walker.

"Stand by! Back water, port! Give way hard, starboard!"

The cutter's headway checked abruptly. She whirled around on her heel—within her own length. There was a crack of straining oars. Men grunted. Sucking whirlpools appeared beside the boat.

Red saw that the German boat was now abeam. He grinned into Gartner's surprised face. He had staked all on that trick turn. A broken oar, one of the men catching a "crab" in the difficult maneuver at full speed, many things could have happened that would lose the race for them. But now, with those worries past, he settled down to the business of getting everything out of his men.

"Give way together," Red shouted, and they did!

The boat slipped into her former stride. The uninterrupted headway of the German boat had pulled them half a length ahead again.

"A little faster, men," coaxed Red, increasing his own tempo.

Gartner threw frequent glances back over his shoulder.

"All right, boys! Put your backs into it." Red grinned as the men shut their eyes and pulled. "We're half way there."

The men opened their eyes to catch the rhythm, and Red's form swayed faster.

THE boat jumped as if alive. Twenty strokes and they were abreast. The German coxswain yelled fiercely at his straining crew. He raved like a madman.

"Half a mile to go," cried Red. "Pull, you devils! Pull! . . . Stroke! . . . Stroke!"

Backward and forward he swayed. His left foot thumping the beat for those whose eyes were filled with sweat, despite the wet bands on their foreheads. The crew responded to Red's eager orders. They half stood at each heave. Stormy's eyes were bloodshot as he blinked the blinding sweat out of them.

Horse Murnane's mouth was a thin hard line separating his pugged nose from his square wide jaw. Sweat streamed down the bronzed bodies. Knees trembled as they reached their oars back for more water. They gained a quarter-length.

Gartner cursed his glassy-eyed crew. He sheered, suddenly. The boat cut in towards the American cutter. It looked as though they would foul the Active boat. Red yelled a warning, and the German shook his free fist. Red saw what was up, and grabbing the spare tiller let it heave. It whizzed past Gartner's head with only a couple of inches to spare. The German hurriedly straightened out his boat.

"American so-and-so!" he snarled. And then to his men: "*Jetzt! . . . Jetzt! . . . Jetzt!*"

Red was calling the American equivalent. "Stroke! . . . Stroke! . . . Stroke! . . . Four hundred yards," he

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cried. "Lift her up!—*Pull!* Bust your damned oars! . . . Stroke! . . . Stroke! . . . Porky, put some beef into it. Pull, blast your hearts! Pull! Lean on it, Dave, you Siwash! Pull! Stroke! . . . Stroke! . . . You lazy bums!—Faster, Murnane, you blasted Orangeman—faster. Get into it!"

Without looking, Red could see the flashing oars of the Germans out of the corner of his eye. He hurled insults at his men. Offered to lick any one of them when the race was over. He abused them in a manner that meant fight in any man's country, but the crew wasn't listening. They were giving the last ounce. Stroke! . . . Stroke! . . . Stroke! . . . Their blurred eyes were closed. Claret was pouring from Porky's nose, but every muscle in that barrel-like body was straining. Red was getting all there was out of his twelve men.

The pistol barked, and the American boat crossed the line a good length ahead. A wild cheer rose from the pierhead and spread all along the water front.

"Way 'nuff—way 'nuff," roared Red. "Dammit, can't you hear? The race is *over!*"

Two men fell backwards in a faint. Others let their heads drop to their breasts as they leaned forward on their oars. They didn't have energy enough left to respond to the wild cheering. That last quarter-mile had been pulled on sheer nerve and will power. Raw hands were brushed weakly across bleared eyes. A few of the men staggered to their feet. There were blood stains on two of the thwarts.

The Rügen crew was in equally bad shape. Gartner raved insanely at his men. Hoots and shouted comments on his lack of sportsmanship rang over the water.

"Shut up, you big windbag," yelled Red at him. "They did the best they could. Shut up and to hell with yuh!" He turned to his own crew. "What say, boys? Three big cheers for the German oarsmen—and a nice long razz for Gartner. *Hip! Hip!*"—and he led his men in a quavery yell, the best they could manage after that long grind. The grandstand crowd helped out—even some of the Rügen officers joined in on the razz for the German coxswain.

The gunboat sailors responded with a few lusty "*hochs*" in spite of Gartner's express command against it. In a few minutes the crews were aboard their respective ships, enjoying a well-earned rubdown and rest.

IT was an hour later that Red Walker received a summons to report to the commander. Entering the cabin he saw, besides Velvet Joe, the captain of the Rügen, looking red and uncomfortable, and scowling in one corner, Gartner. Stein, the six-for-five man, stood beside him, pale and nervous.

"Oh, here you are," purred Joe by way of greeting. "Walker, please tell Captain Kugelmann what you told me this morning."

"Yes, sir." And Red launched into his tale. "I was sitting on the dock last night," he said, "when I saw some one swim out to our cutter anchored in the slip.

"He fussed around out there a while, and then swam back to the pier. Then two figures came up, and I recognized Gartner, here. I couldn't be certain of the other man, but I saw him come aboard the Active." Red looked at Stein, and the six-for-five man wiped a shaking hand over his lips.

"Then I took off my clothes and

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swam out to the boat. I found a large, galvanized iron bucket fastened underneath the cutter by means of a screw-eye and a length of piano wire. The bucket was half full of melted lead, to keep it from bumping against the bottom. It was a swell drag, all right—as good as we ever used in training to make the boys pull harder!"

"And the bucket?" prompted Velvet Joe.

"I've got it locked up, sir. I recognized it as Stein's by a couple of brass rivets and a smear of red lead paint. The boatswain's mate of the foc'sle knew whose it was, too. The minute he saw it."

"That's a lie!" screamed Stein.

"Keep quiet." There was a hard note in Velvet Joe's voice, but it softened when he turned back to Red. "And he said it was German money he was betting this morning?" Joe jerked a thumb toward the trembling money lender.

"That's what he said," grinned Red, "but I knew it was his own. He figured he had a cinch."

"*Harrrumph!*—Quite enough, Commander Morgan. Quite enough." Kapitan Kuglemann glared at Gartner. "This story bears out some suspicions I have had for the past two days." He turned to Red and held out his hand. "Young man, your crew performed marvellously during the race. It was magnificent. *Kolossal!*" Then he wheeled on the cringing boatswain's mate. "Seaman Gartner," he barked, savagely, "you are a disgrace to His Majesty's Service. Hand me your boatswain's pipe . . . You will no longer need it. Report at once to the officer-of-the-deck on your ship. You are under arrest!—About face!—March!" Gartner clumped off, woodenly, while the *kapitan* shook hands with Commander Morgan, and then followed.

"Well, that's that," sighed Velvet Joe. "When you go forward, Walker, take that," he nodded his head toward Stein, "take that with you. See that he pays off all those bets, and then turn him over to the master-at-arms. Have him lock it in the brig."

Red started off with Stein, but the commander stopped him. "By the way, Walker, how much did you win?—Couple of hundred?"

"Coupla thousand," grinned Red. "You see, after I found that bucket I drew my savings account outta the bank. I wanted to clean up on Stein, here, and I figured that if that kraut had to try tricks to win, it was probably a cinch for us. I had to get your friend at the Asiatic Bank to get me the dough before the bank opened for business."

"*Whe-w-w!*" whistled Morgan. "You did clean up, didn't you? I didn't have any idea all that jack that I'm holding in the safe was yours." Velvet Joe grinned. "What are you going to do with all that money, Walker?"

Red turned a deep crimson, and started off without answering. He dragged Stein by the arm.

"I thought so," laughed the commander. "Well, she's a mighty fine girl."

Porky was waiting in the passageway, all flushed with excitement. "Gee, Red, I thought you'd never get through. There's a nifty lookin' jane been askin' for yuh for the last hour. She's waitin' on the dock—yuh lucky stiff."

Porky, all dolled up in his liberty whites, rolled ashore to quench an accumulated thirst.

THE END.

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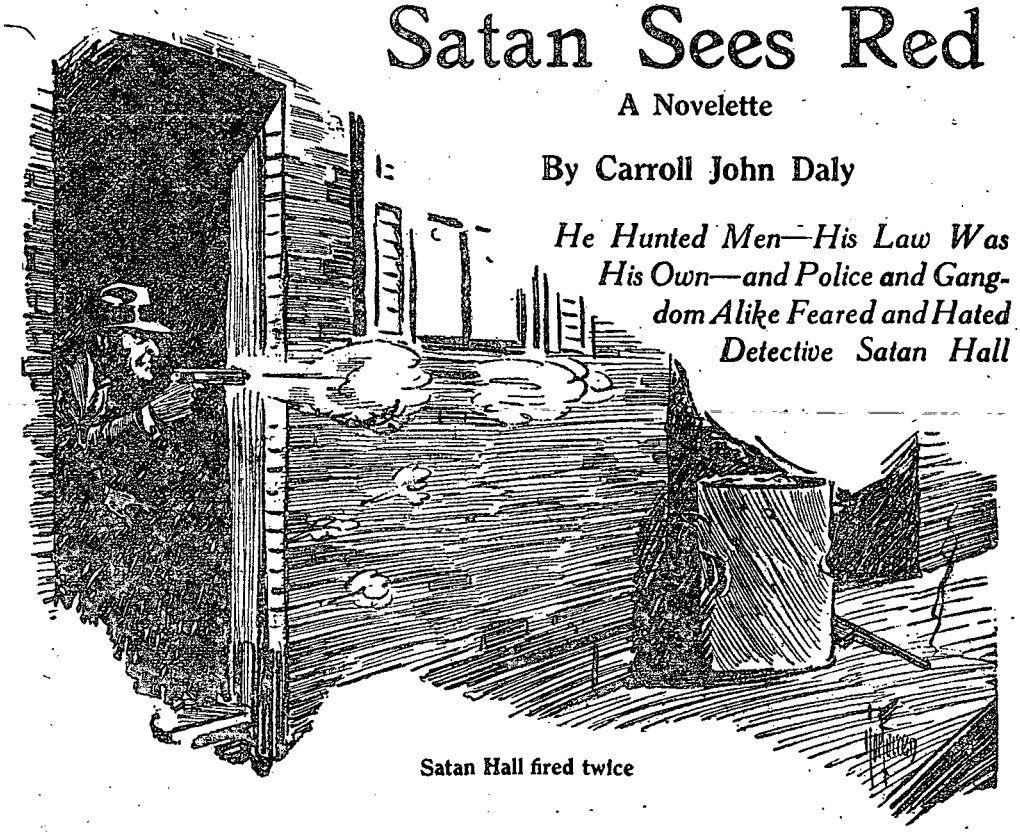
DO YOU READ DETECTIVE FICTION?

Satan Sees Red

A Novelette

By Carroll John Daly

He Hunted Men—His Law Was His Own—and Police and Gangdom Alike Feared and Hated Detective Satan Hall



Satan Hall fired twice

CHAPTER I

Between the Eyes

DETECTIVE SATAN HALL dropped to one knee and fired twice. His movements were so quick—just that sudden, dropping twist of his long body—that the sharp staccato notes of the Tommy gun died almost before it had begun to play its tune of death over the edge of the galvanized ashcan at the end of the alley.

A black touring car, with curtains tightly drawn, which had been moving slowly along the deserted street, suddenly increased its speed; reached the scene of hostilities and slowed down, the high-powered, high-priced motor purring softly.

The thick-set man hidden behind the ashcan came to his feet, tottering slightly. The Thompson machine gun balanced for a moment on the edge of the can, then toppling forward, fell with the clang of metal to the sidewalk.

Don't miss this thrilling novelette—as fast as a bullet, gripping, dramatic—a story of the grim, sardonic, fearless Satan Hall. Read it in next week's DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, on sale Tuesday, June 21.

Read DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY—10c

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Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

A PELLUCIDAR fan:

Danville, Ill.

How about some "Pellucidar" stories by Edgar ce Burroughs?

I have been reading ARGOSY about five years d I think it is a real magazine.

ROBERT PEEVLES.

A GREEABLE surprise:

Chicago, Ill.

Your announcement that Lowell Thomas would on join the fold of ARGOSY writers came as an eeable surprise. Your staff of writers seems to prove with each issue.

John Stanford's dog stories spurred me to write s letter. Couldn't we have more stories of d life? Harold de Polo used to be a steady ntributor, with stories of excellent quality.

. Allan Dunn won my support with "The n Who Hated Women," and Merritt with he Dwellers in the Mirage."

Hoping to hear more from Roscoe and Merritt, emain,

CHARLES G. HALL.

A RIGHT spot:

Pittsburgh, Pa.

he recently published announcements in AR- Y of the coming series of fantastic tales is one the bright spots of the present depression, djustment, or whatever you choose to call it. d the best of all was the announcement of stin Hall's sequel to "The Blind Spot." I read story when it appeared years ago—in fact, tarted my regular reading of ARGOSY with it nd haven't missed an issue since.

The Insect Invasion" starts out well, but ws signs of degenerating into Cummings's reg- staccato style of writing. That particular e becomes a bit wearisome after so many s in the same vein. The prehistoric novel by ny Ainé and Surdez sounds good, as do the ing Venus stories by Burroughs. Will I be ounced as a heretic if I say that Burroughs is oming repetitious in his *Tarzan* tales? The fine flavor of inspiration seems to have de- ted, leaving the last few *Tarzan* novels as flat as stale champagne; yet Burroughs's other stories are still as gripping as ever. *Tarzan* has become a monster as exacting as that of Frankenstein, I fear.

WILLIAM R. RAU, JR.

FROM hold to deck:

Oshkosh, Wis.

As I have read the ARGOSY for years I'd like to say a few words of appreciation about this rightly named magazine: ARGOSY—treasure ship—loaded from "hold" to "deck" with an unbeatable cargo furnished by Edgar Rice Burroughs, W. C. Tuttle, Charles Alden Seltzer, Oscar J. Friend, G. W. Ogden and a host of others who insure a pleasant and successful trip.

The diversification of stories always insures complete satisfaction for the readers no matter what their taste.

I am aboard on every trip, for my ticket is one that has no expiration. I'm a rarin' to go on its next voyage.

ALOIS PAULUS.

WE'VE heard the same from other Birmingham fans:

Birmingham, Ala.

Since I have been reading ARGOSY (about eight months) I have not seen a single letter from Birmingham and I decided you should hear and know that thousands of people, I'm convinced, read and enjoy your magazine. Personally, I think it is *the best* there is.

Let's have more stories by J. E. Grinstead, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and E. S. Gardner.

BOB BATES.

ATTIC treasure:

Toledo, Ohio.

One of my life's greatest thrills was last year when I took an old but comfortable house at the shore for the summer. Imagine my delight to find the attic literally crammed with ARGOSYS of over fifteen years' accumulation, when it was known both as *All-Story* and *Railroad Magazine*. I spent my entire summer with a large stack of grimy books beside me!

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I loved "The Dwellers in the Mirage." It was nearly as good as "The Snake Mother," which is saying a lot, in my estimation. Also like the planet stories such as "Prison Planet."

Also give us more stories with a detective twist and more Foreign Legion and less Westerns. The magazine market is snowed under; too many Westerns.

MRS. ERNEST HAINS.

SURE to be an argument:

Oakland, Calif.

I certainly enjoy the ARGOSY; there's no better magazine on the stands. Whenever I go to visit my friends I leave my ARGOSY home or there is sure to be an argument as to who is going to read it first.

"Tarzan and the City of Gold" is the best story of *Tarzan* that I have ever read. "Soldiers of the Storm" is good so far. My favorite authors are Erle Stanley Gardner, Frank L. Packard, Theodore Roscoe, and Burroughs.

FRANK GELSO.

SPLENDID:

Rock Island, Ill.

What splendid stories have appeared within ARGOSY's covers recently! Among the better stories were: "The Arctic Patrol," "The Port of Fools," "Outlaw's Holiday," "Siege of Ste. Anne," "Land of Poison Springs" and "Pines of Death."

"Tarzan and the City of Gold," by Edgar Rice Burroughs, is one of the finest *Tarzan* stories that it has been my privilege to read.

VERNE K. LEMON.

FEVER:

Brooklyn, N. Y.

I am only a new member of your multitude of admirers, but an extremely loud one. I started reading ARGOSY ten weeks ago and my temperature is still above 120°. Boy, how those serials of Burroughs and Thomson Burtis can work you up to a fever. Well, I won't bother you by telling what stories I like best because they're all good.

JAMES C. KENNEDY.

EXPLANATION:

Philadelphia, Pa.

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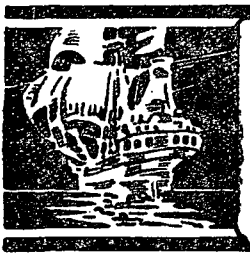

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

A PELLUCIDAR fan:

Danville, Ill.

How about some "Pellucidar" stories by Edgar Rice Burroughs?

I have been reading ARGOSY about five years and I think it is a real magazine.

ROBERT PEEVLES.

AGREEABLE surprise:

Chicago, Ill.

Your announcement that Lowell Thomas would soon join the fold of ARGOSY writers came as an agreeable surprise. Your staff of writers seems to improve with each issue.

John Stanford's dog stories spurred me to write this letter. Couldn't we have more stories of wild life? Harold de Polo used to be a steady contributor, with stories of excellent quality.

J. Allan Dunn won my support with "The Man Who Hated Women," and Merritt with "The Dwellers in the Mirage."

Hoping to hear more from Roscoe and Merritt, I remain,

CHARLES G. HALL.

RIGHT spot:

Pittsburgh, Pa.

The recently published announcements in ARGOSY of the coming series of fantastic tales is one of the bright spots of the present depression, readjustment, or whatever you choose to call it. And the best of all was the announcement of Austin Hall's sequel to "The Blind Spot." I read the story when it appeared years ago—in fact, I started my regular reading of ARGOSY with it —and haven't missed an issue since.

"The Insect Invasion" starts out well, but shows signs of degenerating into Cummings's regular staccato style of writing. That particular style becomes a bit wearisome after so many tales in the same vein. The prehistoric novel by Rosny Ainé and Surdez sounds good, as do the coming Venus stories by Burroughs. Will I be denounced as a heretic if I say that Burroughs is becoming repetitious in his *Tarzan* tales? The first fine flavor of inspiration seems to have departed, leaving the last few *Tarzan* novels as flat as stale champagne; yet Burroughs's other stories are still as gripping as ever. *Tarzan* has become a monster as exacting as that of Frankenstein, I fear.

WILLIAM R. RAU, JR.

FROM hold to deck:

Oshkosh, Wis.

As I have read the ARGOSY for years I'd like to say a few words of appreciation about this rightly named magazine: ARGOSY—treasure ship—loaded from "hold" to "deck" with an unbeatable cargo furnished by Edgar Rice Burroughs, W. C. Tuttle, Charles Alden Seltzer, Oscar J. Friend, G. W. Ogden and a host of others who insure a pleasant and successful trip.

The diversification of stories always insures complete satisfaction for the readers no matter what their taste.

I am aboard on every trip, for my ticket is one that has no expiration. I'm a rarin' to go on its next voyage.

ALOIS PAULUS.

WE'VE heard the same from other Birmingham fans:

Birmingham, Ala.

Since I have been reading ARGOSY (about eight months) I have not seen a single letter from Birmingham and I decided you should hear and know that thousands of people, I'm convinced, read and enjoy your magazine. Personally, I think it is *the best* there is.

Let's have more stories by J. E. Grinstead, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and E. S. Gardner.

BOB BATES.

ATTIC treasure:

Toledo, Ohio.

One of my life's greatest thrills was last year when I took an old but comfortable house at the shore for the summer. Imagine my delight to find the attic literally crammed with ARGOSYS of over fifteen years' accumulation, when it was known both as *All-Story* and *Railroad Magazine*. I spent my entire summer with a large stack of grimy books beside me!

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I loved "The Dwellers in the Mirage." It was nearly as good as "The Snake Mother," which is saying a lot, in my estimation. Also like the planet stories such as "Prison Planet."

Also give us more stories with a detective twist and more Foreign Legion and less Westerns. The magazine market is snowed under; too many Westerns.

MRS. ERNEST HAINS.

SURE to be an argument:

Oakland, Calif.

I certainly enjoy the ARGOSY; there's no better magazine on the stands. Whenever I go to visit my friends I leave my ARGOSY home or there is sure to be an argument as to who is going to read it first.

"Tarzan and the City of Gold" is the best story of *Tarzan* that I have ever read. "Soldiers of the Storm" is good so far. My favorite authors are Erle Stanley Gardner, Frank L. Packard, Theodore Roscoe, and Burroughs.

FRANK GELSO.

SPLENDID:

Rock Island, Ill.

What splendid stories have appeared within ARGOSY's covers recently! Among the better stories were: "The Arctic Patrol," "The Port of Fools," "Outlaw's Holiday," "Siege of Ste. Anne," "Land of Poison Springs" and "Pines of Death."

"Tarzan and the City of Gold," by Edgar Rice Burroughs, is one of the finest *Tarzan* stories that it has been my privilege to read.

VERNE K. LEMON.

FEVER:

Brooklyn, N. Y.

I am only a new member of your multitude of admirers, but an extremely loud one. I started reading ARGOSY ten weeks ago and my temperature is still above 120°. Boy, how those serials of Burroughs and Thomson Burtis can work you up to a fever. Well, I won't bother you by telling what stories I like best because they're all good.

JAMES C. KENNEDY.

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IF YOU DON'T KNOW—

FIND OUT

HOW YOUR LAXATIVE WORKS

Your very health is at stake!

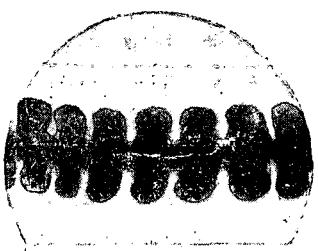
Don't think constipation is unimportant simply because so many people are subject to it. Doctors will tell you it is an underlying cause of a great proportion of common ills today.

"Constipated!" you say. "I'll take a laxative." But hold on! *Which* laxative will you take? For there are many—and only a few are good for you.

Many wrong laxatives actually *aggravate* constipation instead of correcting it! For in giving relief they rob Nature of a necessary function—response to the delicate *natural* impulse. Their violent methods are opposed to Nature's way.

Ex-Lax acts as Nature does

The right laxative, the doctor will tell you, simply "nudges" Nature, when delayed—puts Nature back to work. Such a laxative is Ex-Lax—America's leading laxative in point of sales.



X-ray of a Normal Intestine
The peristaltic muscles knead and churn constantly to eliminate waste matter. When action is delayed, Ex-Lax simply gives Nature a gentle nudge and proper function is resumed.

Beware of Violent Cathartics!
Chronic constipation distends the intestines, causing loss of muscle "tone." Repeated abuse with violent cathartics may further impair the action of these muscles, thus often doing more harm than good.

Ex-Lax does not gripe. It does not over-stimulate the intestines. It does not rush food through the intestines before assimilation is complete.

Doctors approve the Ex-Lax way

All of these things are important, doctors know. And that is why the Ex-Lax way, gentle but effective, has the stamp of medical approval.

Ex-Lax is not absorbed into the system; its use does not cause harmful after-effects. It is not habit-forming. Pleasant to the taste, millions—old and young—use Ex-Lax.

Phenolphthalein is the only medicinal ingredient of Ex-Lax. Presented in a deliciously chocolated form, this laxative is known to doctors the world over for its mild effectiveness.

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